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Kuljit Bhamra

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£2.80 Issue 5

March 2008

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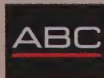
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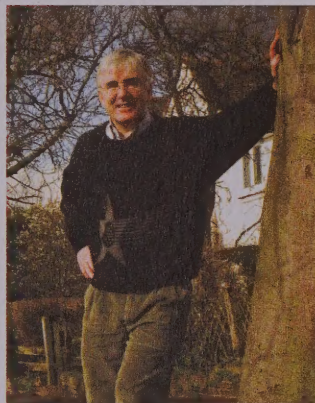


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editorial

Freud's flawed analysis



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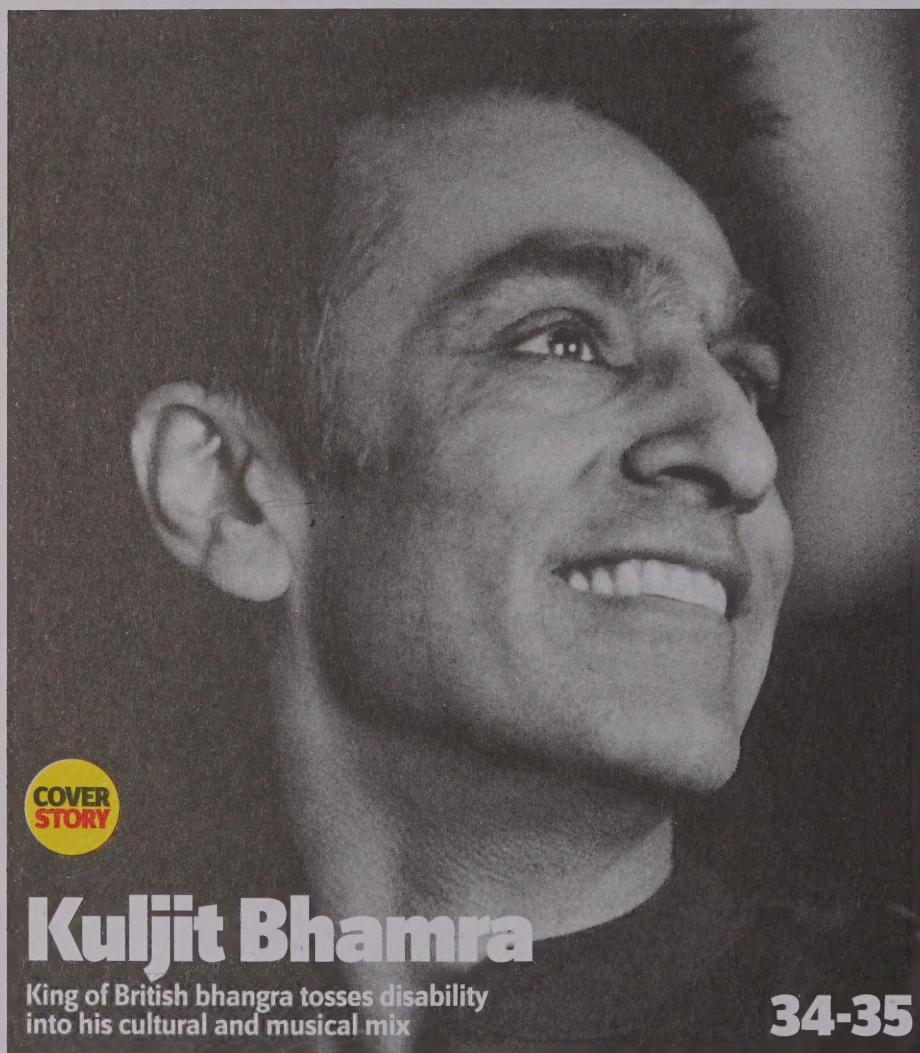
In the previous issue of this very magazine, Peter Hain, the now departed work and pensions secretary, was at great pains to distance himself from what he was on record as having said on benefit fraud. It just goes to show the danger inherent in easily turned phrases such as "Sicknote Britain" which had, in any case, always seemed at best glib and at worst a gross misrepresentation of reality. But no sooner had the beleaguered cabinet minister rather sheepishly rowed himself back from what he disingenuously described as unhelpful government rhetoric than he was obliged to step down over his own carelessness with money which was apparently worthy of further investigation by the police.

Enter David Freud (*above*). As the great-grandson of Sigmund he clearly feels well qualified to make free with

his views on the psyche of disabled people. And, having spent three whole weeks researching the subject and writing a draft report for Tony Blair, can he really have the depth of knowledge to inform his conclusions and solutions? Then again, his background in the high octane high finance world of investment banking has obviously given him the ability to understand and empathise with the lives of people living on state benefits. Patently not. While he opines that between five and seven per cent of incapacity benefit recipients are working while claiming, the generally accepted level of fraud is said to be around 0.5 per cent. His contention that the relationship between claimant and GP is riddled with self-perpetuating self-interest flies in the face of the fact that Britain has among the most rigorous medical eligibility and assessment processes. Perhaps less tangible, but no less real, is the danger in feeding the agenda that has us as disabled people only too ready to wangle and swindle our way through the benefits system, which can arguably lead to the kind of hate crime which we report in our news pages.

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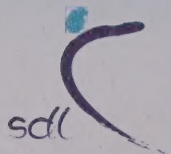
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breakingnews

DWP adviser horrifies campaigners over IB

Katharine Quarmby

Disability organisations are furious at comments made by David Freud, a former investment banker who has been appointed as an adviser on benefit reform to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mr Freud used his first interview in post to launch a devastating critique of incapacity benefit (IB). He claimed, in a February interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, that up to two thirds of those claiming IB are not entitled to it, dubbed the eligibility tests "ludicrous" and said that between five to seven per cent were working on the black market. He said: "If

you're disabled, work is good for you and not working is bad for you." He also praised James Purnell, who has taken over as work and pensions secretary after Peter Hain was forced to resign following a police inquiry into undeclared donations to his deputy leadership campaign. Mr Freud commented that Mr Purnell's appointment meant that "there is going to be more single-minded ferocity" about benefit reform.

The Tories have already endorsed what David Cameron has dubbed a "tough love" approach based on the American Wisconsin model (see *Disability Now January*).

Disability groups are horrified by the new rhetoric. Paul Treloar, of the charity Disability Alliance, said many of Mr Freud's claims – about fraudulent claimants, for example, are "completely unevicenced". He adds that such talk "is creating tremendous fear and anxiety among disabled people. This is a key emerging battlefield between the two parties."

Ian Charlesworth, chief executive of the Shaw Trust, which runs many of the government's welfare to work local programmes, is also worried, saying that Mr Freud may have "lost the plot a little bit... I don't think that people are swinging the lead. We aren't funding the programmes to get

them back to work."

Disability Now asked the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) whether it agreed with Mr Freud that the disability tests used to award benefits are "ludicrous". A spokesman said, instead, that a "fairer and more accurate medical test" would be introduced. The spokesman also refused to agree with Mr Freud's claim that only about one third of current IB claims are credible, saying instead only that "there are many more people who could and should be supported to move off benefits". The spokesman also refused to be drawn on whether the DWP agreed with Mr Freud's estimate of IB fraud.

Pub boss sacked over student assault

Sunil Peck

A pub landlord has lost his job after he assaulted a disabled drinker in his pub.

Luke Barbanneau (right), who has cerebral palsy and is studying at Cambridge University, was drinking with friends in the Mill pub in Cambridge when the incident happened on 14 January.

He told the *Cambridge Evening News*: "The



SVEN PALYS

manager came over and talked to us – he seemed a bit drunk, but quite friendly.

He asked who looked after me and I answered that I looked after myself."

He added, in a later interview: "He picked me up by the back of the coat collar, and physically dragged me across the floor, to the door, telling other patrons that I was making it up. We presume that he was talking about my disability."

Bill Hainsworth, the operations director of the

company which owns The Mill, Passionate Pubs, told *Disability Now*: "I have had an investigation, I have had a disciplinary meeting and the manager has been dismissed."

He added: "I have been in this industry for a lot of years and I have never encountered an incident of this type, which is why we viewed it as seriously as we did."

Cambridgeshire police said a 47-year-old man had been cautioned for common assault.

The PM who outed himself

Former Norwegian prime minister Kjell Magne Bondevik tells **Sunil Peck** there's no reason why someone experiencing mental illness should be disqualified from a political career

It is hard to imagine a British politician "coming out" as a mental health service-user. But ten years ago the Norwegian Prime Minister of the time did just that – and kept his job – when he was diagnosed with depression.

That was during his first term in office. In 2001, Norwegian voters elected him for a second term.

I caught up with Mr Bondevik as he was about to address a packed, cross-party parliamentary reception organised by the charity Stand to Reason, which campaigns to combat the stigma faced by mental health service-users.

"It should not be something mysterious. I feel that you should have the same openness about mental illness as physical [illness]," he says. "If you get a heart attack or cancer, normally you are open. People can recover, people can come back – as I did."

Kjell Magne Bondevik was elected Prime Minister of Norway in 1997. But one Sunday in August 1998, he became too ill to summon up the energy to get out of bed and realised that he



NINA KATINKA FREDRIKSEN (SPA)

Kjell Magne Bondevik at the parliamentary reception

needed a break. His instinct was to resign but his foreign minister talked him out of it.

He then went public on his illness – first, to quash any speculation about his

“Common law dating back centuries bans ‘lunatics’ and ‘idiots’ from standing for parliament”

absence, and second in the hope of contributing to more openness around mental health issues.

The electorate respected

his frankness and he got thousands of supportive letters. "Some said: 'We have similar problems, we are so happy that you were open because it is now easy for us to be open and talk to family and friends, and get professional help.'"

When Mr Bondevik fell ill, Norway was facing tricky economic and political circumstances with the price of oil falling and interest rates rising. But his psychiatrist pinpointed different causes of his illness: "One is that I worked too hard for too long and had heavy burdens on my

shoulders. Second is that I lost many of my close friends during a limited period, most of them from brain cancer, and I had no time to work on this grief."

Mr Bondevik told *Disability Now* that he thought mental illness was "rather common" among politicians. That coincides with estimates that 1 in 4 people in the UK undergo mental illness at some point in their lives. But he thinks it could be some time before we see more frankness among British politicians.

"What people say to me here in [the] UK and in other countries [is]: 'That could never happen here.'"

Stand to Reason says that a person harbouring ambitions of a political career could be prevented from standing as an MP by a common law dating back hundreds of years which disqualifies "lunatics" and "idiots" from standing for parliament.

The charity has sent an anonymous questionnaire to MPs, peers and their staff, looking at attitudes to, and awareness of, mental illness. The results will be published later this year.

breakingnews

Disabled people: new weapon of war

Katharine Quarmby

On 1 February two "suicide" bombers blew up two pet markets in Baghdad, in Iraq, killing around 70 people.

A senior Iraqi military official claimed afterwards that the two bombers, both of whom were women, had Down's syndrome and that their vests were detonated by remote control.

Major General Jeffrey Hammond, commander of US forces in Baghdad, showed journalists photos and observed that the two

women were probably used because they didn't understand what was happening and were less likely to be searched.

A journalist, Larry Kaplow, of *Newsweek*, said of the photographs: "They could have been sisters.

According to Iraqi officials, both women had Down's syndrome. The theory is that they were tricked into carrying the explosives."

Condoleeza Rice, US secretary of state, remarked that use of disabled people showed the "absolute

bankruptcy and brutality" of insurgents in Iraq.

Many other newspapers pointed to a similar story in 2005, when another Iraqi official claimed that a boy who had detonated a bomb during the elections was disabled.

Similar claims have been made in Afghanistan.

Others are more doubtful. Larry Kaplow, when asked by *Disability Now* whether he was sure that the alleged bombers were disabled, said: "Some characteristics were there but not

conclusive proof."

A spokeswoman for the Multi-National Forces in Baghdad was also cautious, saying only that "initial medical reports indicate that the women appeared to be disabled".

Bob Lambourne, director for forensic services in the British Embassy in Baghdad, has added that suggesting the two bombers had Down's syndrome from photographs was "dangerous" and that the "diagnosis would have to be more scientific than that".

Rethink on Britney

News of Britney Spears's recent hospitalisation has prompted mental health charity Rethink to release guidance for journalists and news consumers in the UK.

Miss Spears, like other disabled parents (see *feature, pages 30-32*), has lost custody of her children.

Reacting to media coverage of the pop star's second visit to a psychiatric ward in a month, Rethink has issued *What is Bipolar Disorder?* to help people understand the star's condition better and gain some perspective on what the star is going through.

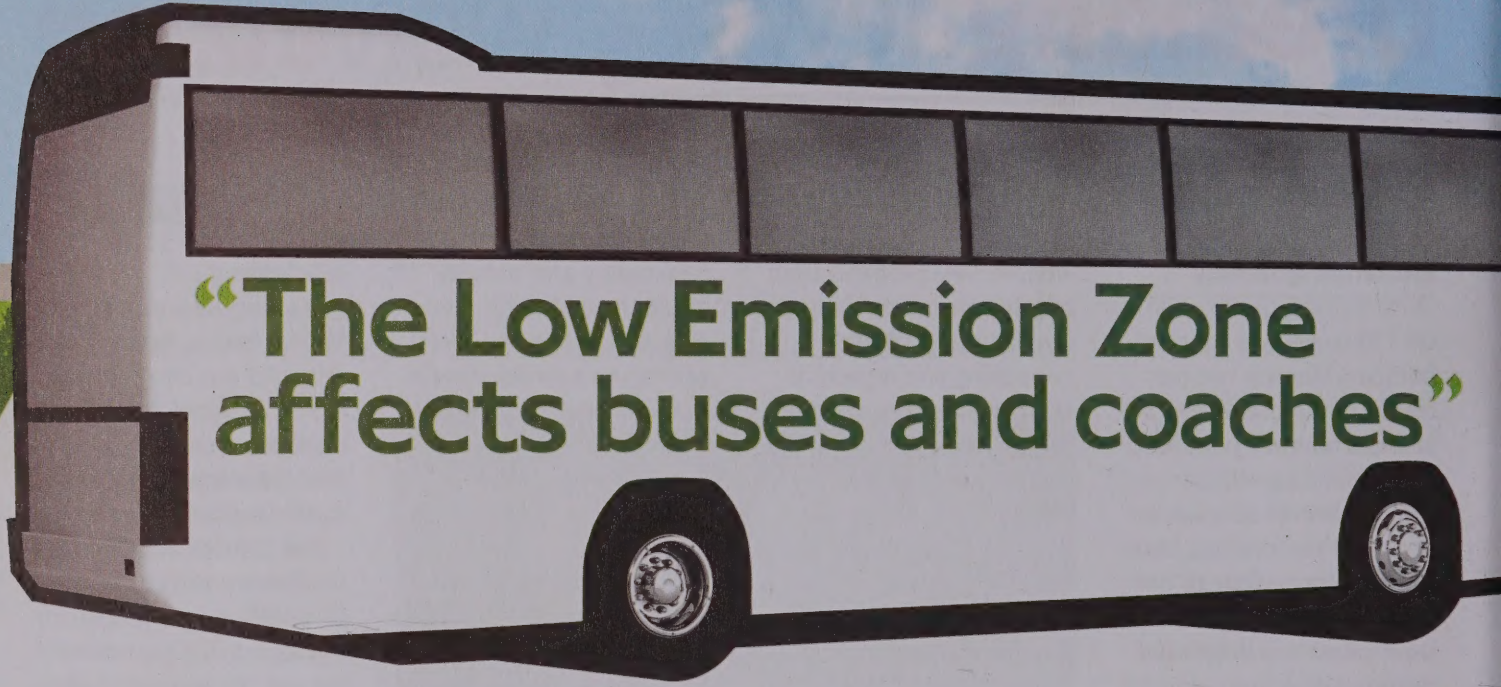
Rethink's Paul Corry said that reporting on Britney's mental health crisis has ranged from "sympathetic to downright irresponsible".

Mr Corry said: "Celebrities are not immune to mental illness nor to the stigma that often follows. Like others affected by bipolar disorder Britney needs to be able to access treatment and support to help her recover. Being in the glare of the spotlight may make this difficult for her but bipolar disorder is a manageable illness; and there is no reason why Britney cannot recover and pick up her successful career again."



Holocaust Day commemorated nationwide

Thousands marked Holocaust Memorial Day, at the end of January, with events to commemorate victims of the Holocaust and other genocides. Ade Adepitan, a supporter of the event, said: "If I'd been brought up in Nazi Germany in World War Two, my disability would have led to almost certain death. This is why I support the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's theme of 'Remember, reflect, react'."



"The Low Emission Zone affects buses and coaches"

The Low Emission Zone (LEZ) covers most of Greater London and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. There is a phased launch. Lorries over 12 tonnes are now affected. Buses and coaches will be affected from 7 July.


What you need to do

- If you plan to drive a diesel-engined vehicle into Greater London, find out beforehand whether your vehicle meets the Euro III standard for particulate matter.
- You can do this by referring to the table opposite, using the vehicle compliance checker online at tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon or calling us on 0845 607 0009.
- From 7 July if you have not taken action to meet the required emissions standards you will have to pay the daily £200 charge to drive within the zone.
- You can pay this online at tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon or call 0845 607 0009 up to midnight on the first working day after travel. If you fail to pay this charge, you will be issued with a Penalty Charge Notice.
- There are other options so that you do not need to pay the daily charge: reorganise your fleet (so only vehicles that do meet the standards are driven within the zone), modify your vehicle by fitting approved pollution abatement equipment (which may take up to two months) or upgrade to a newer vehicle.
- All non-GB licensed vehicles (inc. Northern Ireland) which meet the emissions standards need to be registered with Transport for London. Registration forms are available online or call 0845 607 0009 or (+44) 20 7310 8998 from overseas.

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Buses and coaches. Diesel-engined passenger vehicles with more than eight seats plus the driver's seat exceeding 5 tonnes Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW).	7 July 2008 Euro III for PM	From 7 July the LEZ emissions standard is Euro III for particulate matter (PM). Vehicles first registered as new with the DVLA on or after 1 October 2001 are assumed to meet this standard.
	3 January 2012 Euro IV for PM	From 3 January 2012 the LEZ emissions standard will be raised to Euro IV for PM. Vehicles first registered as new with the DVLA on or after 1 October 2006 are assumed to meet this standard.
Minibuses. Diesel-engined passenger vehicles with more than eight seats plus the driver's seat below 5 tonnes GVW.	4 October 2010 Euro III for PM	From 4 October 2010 the LEZ emissions standard is Euro III for PM. Vehicles first registered as new with the DVLA on or after 1 January 2002 are assumed to meet this standard.

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newsroundup



'I exist': National Autistic Society spells out its message

Thousands of adults with autism in England are isolated and ignored because they receive inadequate support from government and local authorities, a new report found. The National Autistic Society (NAS) questioned almost 1,500 people with autism and their families. More than half of adults were experiencing depression due to a lack of support. Pictured is NAS president Jane Asher with people with autism at the launch of the report at Westminster.

Killers face life sentences

One of two teenagers who took part in a drink-fuelled gang attack on a defenceless disabled man for "sport" was facing a life sentence after being convicted of murder.

Brent Martin was punched, kicked, stamped on and head-butted repeatedly by the teenager and two other youths who bet each other £5 they could knock him out.

The two teenagers, aged 16 and 17, and a third man, William Hughes, 21, chased Mr Martin for a mile-and-a-

half across two estates in Sunderland. They left him dying in a pool of blood.

Hughes, of Washington Road, Sunderland, and the 16-year-old, who cannot be named for legal reasons, pleaded guilty to murder.

The 17-year-old, also from Sunderland, had denied the charge but was convicted by a jury at Newcastle Crown Court.

All now face life sentences. They were due to be sentenced on 29 February.

Alliance wins £4 million in lottery aid

A new alliance aimed at improving the performance of disabled people's organisations (DPOs) secured more than £4 million in lottery funding.

Disability LIB (Listen Include Build) was given £4.2 million by the Big Lottery Fund to try to avert the "crisis" facing DPOs and increase their effectiveness.

The alliance aims to help more than 200 DPOs in England over three years.

The charity Scope will work with six DPOs: People First, Disability Awareness in Action, the UK's Disabled People's Council (UKDPC), Equalities National Council, the Alliance for Inclusive Education and Preston DISC (Disability Information Services Centre).

Scots line up on hate

The Scottish government backed proposals to protect disabled and gay people under Scottish hate crime laws. The proposals were originally lodged by Green

MSP Patrick Harvie.

If approved, the bill would bring Scotland into line with England and Wales and increase sentences for crimes motivated by "hostility or ill will".

It will go forward as a handout member's bill, which means it is being government sponsored and supported.

Remploy staff fight factories closure plan

Remploy staff in Birkenhead, Aintree and York began a series of strikes in protest at plans to close factories.

The walk-outs, to be held on Wednesdays and Thursdays, follow November's statement by former work and pensions secretary Peter Hain that he backed plans to close 17 of Remploy's 83 factories and merge another 11.

As *Disability Now* went to press, results were awaited of ballots at five factories in Hartlepool, Treforest, St Helens, Ystradgynlais and Brynammon.

Detailed consultations are underway over possible strike action at the remaining threatened factories.

Remploy chief executive Bob Warner said: "The company and government have promised that no disabled employee will be made compulsorily redundant and every disabled employee will have the support they need for as long as they need it."

Blue badge progress

The government launched a consultation on new plans to reduce fraud and misuse connected with blue parking badges.

The proposals would also extend the scheme to more parents of disabled children with bulky medical equipment and people with severe autism.

The government also wants to help enable councils to share information on blue badges and would give parking attendants powers to confiscate blue badges

that have been forged, stolen or used fraudulently, and improve the design of the badge to prevent forgeries.

But the government said it was "not minded" to remove the exemption from the blue badge scheme of four central London boroughs and suggested that it could give other local authorities the power to adapt the scheme.

The government is also likely to let local authorities raise the maximum fee for a blue badge from £2.

Care cut by cash-strapped councils

Eligibility for social care is getting tougher, warned England's care watchdog.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), which regulates care homes and social care in the community, found that social care criteria were being tightened by cash-strapped local authorities.

The watchdog said the number of councils offering care only to individuals with "critical" or "substantial" needs rose by a third in 2006-2007.



First-class delivery: Royal Mail gets new stamps licked

Six new stamps on sale from last month show working dogs, including an assistance dog called Rowan (*top left*) and a guide dog called Warwick (*below left*). Assistance dog Endal (*right*) posts a letter in central London as he helps Royal Mail launch the new set.



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campaigns

Brent case sparks outcry

It has been a very busy month for our disability hate crime campaign. By **Katharine Quarmby**

We are all mourning the death of Brent Martin, who was viciously murdered in August last year (see *News Round-up* for more details). He was on the cusp of a new, independent life. He had a flat of his own, a job and a girlfriend. Instead of being able to enjoy life to the full, he was killed for a bet.

The murder of Mr Martin sparked both a national and international outcry. The *BBC 10 O'Clock News* covered the end of the trial, linking it to our campaign and highlighting the dossier of crimes that we had compiled just before Christmas (see www.disabilitynow.org.uk for more details). The *Independent* newspaper followed suit, highlighting our work.

He had a flat of his own, a job and a girlfriend. Instead of being able to enjoy life to the full, he was killed for a bet

A number of disabled people's organisations and disability charities are now working together informally on disability hate crime,



sharing information and discussing how best to move forward in influencing government, police and prosecutors to take disability hate crime more seriously.

More evidence emerged about the shocking level of violence experienced by blind people. A survey by Action for Blind People, published in January, found that blind people are far more likely to be targeted than others. Many are both physically and verbally abused.

We want to find out more about why people attack disabled people – who are the assailants, do they share any common features? This

offender profiling approach has helped police identify different groups of men who rape. We think that this approach would be useful with disability hate crime. If anyone works in this field, we would very much like to be in touch with them.

Mark Sherry, an American academic who has written for us before (*Disability Now* December 2007, *World View*), has shared some of his work with us. He agrees that “many discussions of hate

crime completely ignore the issue of disability”. He identifies some very interesting issues around hate crime – that often, for instance, two crimes are embedded within one act – known as “parallel crimes”. A crime such as vandalism, theft, arson or murder occurs at the same time as the victim being targeted because they are disabled (a so-called bias crime). This “parallel crime” theory explains why police often concentrate on the straightforward offence, rather than investigating the hate crime element, because bias is harder to prove. Interestingly, he says that they may differ from other forms of hate crime in that while most hate crimes are stranger crimes, this does not seem to be the case with disability hate crime – something that we have observed in our analysis of such crimes here.

Keep reporting the crimes, and keep talking to us – your comments are very much valued.

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politics

The bill that Jack built

Lord Ashley says his independent living bill would transform the lives of disabled people. He tells **Paul Carter** why he is determined to force it onto the statute books

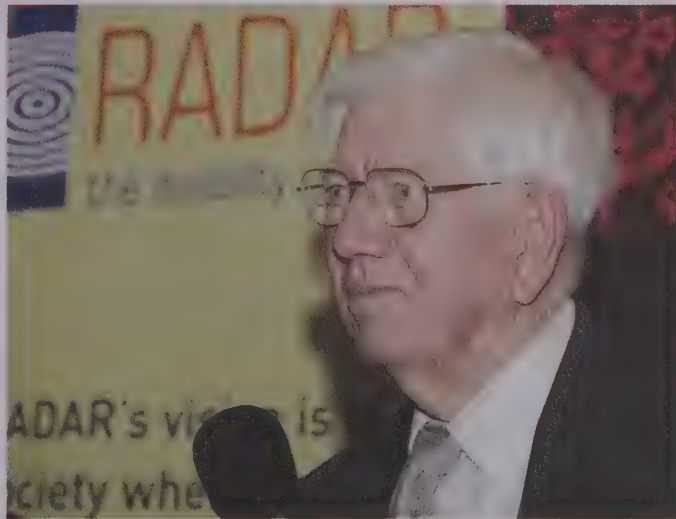
It is now almost 16 months since Lord (Jack) Ashley of Stoke first introduced his disabled persons (independent living) bill to the House of Lords, aimed at revolutionising the rights of disabled people in Britain.

The bill would impose a duty on local authorities to provide services that would enable disabled people to live more independent lives, such as communication support, advocacy services and access to suitable accommodation.

The bill was first passed by the Lords last April, and was subsequently introduced into the Commons by Labour MP Roger Berry, where it failed to receive a second reading due to a lack of parliamentary time, something Lord Ashley finds frustrating.

"Each minister I've spoken to individually has said that it's a good bill, but they say there's not enough parliamentary time. They use it as an excuse," he says.

Lord Ashley has now



Lord Ashley at last month's parliamentary reception to mark 40 years of the all-party parliamentary disability group

reintroduced the bill into the Lords, where as *Disability Now* went to press it was due to go through the committee stage and receive its third reading.

It's a good bill, but they say there's not enough parliamentary time. They use it as an excuse

He remains "very optimistic" about the bill. "Public opinion is now flowing our way. In many ways, the provision for

introduce the bill in its entirety, as it would be too expensive, a view he feels is rather simplistic. "The bill will be expensive, but not in the long run. The measures will get more disabled people back to work, there will be more income from taxes, there will be less spending. It will transform the whole situation."

Without government support, it is extremely unlikely that the bill will make it onto the statute book, but Lord Ashley remains undeterred, and even exhibits an air of defiance.

"I'll keep bringing the bill back to the Lords. I think if it keeps coming back, along with the combination of public pressure, we can get the bill passed," he says.

"We need comprehensive legislation to ensure equality for disabled people. Words are often used like 'choice' and 'control' but basically we need legislative control. What we have at the moment is a patchwork of legislation that is shabby and weak.

"The main aim is to change the system to guarantee disabled people the rights they need."

disabled people is there – you go into shops or restaurants or cafes, and the provisions are there to see. It's just not enough. We need legislation that is comprehensive. I believe that this bill is not just a blueprint but also an action plan. It's an extremely well thought-out and comprehensive bill."

Ministers have told Lord Ashley they don't want to

→ Have your say

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- phone us 020 7619 7323

Calling all the shots

Time travel suddenly became more accessible. There was a time when, if you couldn't see whether Gene Hunt had just hit someone or been clouted himself, you'd have to rely on someone who could, filling you in on the action. But now shows like *Ashes To Ashes* (right) and *Dr Who* have been enhanced by being audio described.

Audio Description (AD) is an optional audio track which lets you know when smouldering looks are being exchanged or who just smacked whom in the face.

There are two reasons for it having become more available. Firstly, more



broadcasters recognised their duty to make shows accessible across the whole range of audience needs, so they started adding AD and subtitles to more of their output. Secondly, there's been a rise in availability of digital TV equipment which can carry the extra service.

But according to figures from the broadcasting

regulator Ofcom, 60 per cent of people have never heard of AD. That's why, over the past few weeks, you may have seen promos for the service which have been running across more than 70 channels.

Broadcasters and the RNIB have also launched the Audio Description logo which will let you know whether the digi box you are about to buy will be capable of bringing the service to you. Meanwhile, pressure has to remain on broadcasters to describe more of their programmes. Maybe we should ask Gene Hunt to go round and use his persuasive charms on them.

Beeb's phone-in hang-up

By Marion Bull

The invitation from BBC London 94.9 was effusive: "We'd definitely like you in on the show. We'll send a car to pick you up."

I'd been chosen from several others when BBC London's *The Late Show* wanted travel writers on Christmas Eve to talk about Christmas customs abroad. Travelling alone and independently to remote places, I had lots of story

ideas. I told them I'd once encountered a mixture of Catholicism and witchcraft at Midnight Mass in the Ivory Coast.

I'd done live broadcasts before – a travel documentary on North African TV (I lipread French) – but I explained that with no hearing at all, for a phone-in, I'd need someone to jot down the questions quickly. I envisaged a slight delay, but it wouldn't be difficult to fill in for a few

seconds. Or mention that the speaker is deaf.

But apparently that wasn't acceptable. The reply came. Sorry, but it wouldn't be possible after all, because it was going out live. "But let us know when you're next in London..." I'd already said I'm there every week.

Perhaps Auntie is being protective, or possibly unwilling to try the unknown. It's a shame the producer didn't recognise that people's capabilities can be greater than a corporate imagination.

CAPTURED

TV tot show rumours

Rumours have reached *Disability Now* that top TV show for tots, *The Tweenies*, is giving serious thought to introducing a disabled character. It's not yet clear whether they'll join Fizz and Jake among the little ones or Max and Judy the grown-ups. But maybe it means Doodles will become an assistance dog?

Suffering in silence no longer

Yes, the S-word is back in a big way across BBC TV and radio news. Disabled people are wantonly described as "suffering from" everything from Alzheimer's to MND. Meanwhile, what we're actually suffering from is this terrific pain in the neck brought on by severe irritation, particularly as the dreaded wheelchair-bound seems to have made a comeback too. If we all emailed every time it happened would they get the message? Why not give it a go.

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ABI HARDWICK



RADAR chief executive **Liz Sayce** explains why she joined the EHRC's disability committee and what she's hoping for from the equality body

Those of us in the disability movement should be having a bigger, broader impact.

Carers' organisations are working with government on their carers' strategy. Older people's bodies are lobbying on social care funding. Imagine what we could achieve if we all pulled together to make the principle of social services, based on independent living principles, the hottest issue for the next general election, with policies that work for disabled and older people and our families and friends. And anyway, how many of us fit into several of those categories?

I wanted to join the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) disability committee, working with Jane Campbell and others, because I could see opportunities to increase impact by working on wider equalities agendas.

We need to join forces with allies where we can increase our impact

There are also real risks – that disability experience could be watered down and that the momentum of the DRC's few years could be

lost. That is why I'll be urging the EHRC to do three things in the next few months:

1 Show its teeth and influence, using enforcement and other pressure to tackle major injustices – for example, the exclusion of people with learning disabilities from the Paralympics and the ongoing failure of some public sector bodies to get anywhere near complying with the disability equality duty.

2 Plan concerted to make a long-term difference to the disadvantages of disabled people. This means not only removing the more obvious access barriers but also tackling things like low pay, low skills and poverty. We hear so much from government about closing gender pay gaps and breaking

through glass ceilings – but when it comes to disability, getting a million more disabled people “into work” (any work?) seems like the height of our aspirations. When a third of British people with no qualifications are disabled; when disabled people are the only group for whom poverty has worsened in the last decade; and when acquiring a health condition or impairment means life chances plummeting, we need a much more serious approach to reducing poverty.

3 Become an example of good practice in employing, serving and engaging disabled people (in a meaningful and ongoing way).

We will be watching as the EHRC develops. Some will be getting involved at national and local levels. We also need to join forces with allies where we can increase our impact.

There are many energetic campaigns and coalitions. Some are age or impairment specific – like Every Disabled Child Matters or Stand to Reason (which aims for rights for people with mental health problems in employment and leadership). Some are topic specific, like the Disability Benefits Consortium or Our Lives Our Choices.

If we harness that energy and extend our range of partners we will magnify our impact. RADAR plans to do just that.

worldview



The presidential race isn't just Republicans vs Democrats. Independent candidate **Frank Moore** wants to become the first disabled president since Roosevelt

I'm running for US president.

I've been running – or rolling in my wheelchair – on the campaign trail now for over a year. I started because no other candidate was talking about the issues that the average person cares about in a direct, clear way. So I started to.

And people have responded overwhelmingly.

My having cerebral palsy does not seem to matter to

most people. In fact they seem to see it as an asset.

I'm a member of a suppressed group. But I've successfully fought discrimination all my life and had fun doing it! Most people get that and feel hope. Then they read my platform – and they're hooked!

There's been one exception to this. An aide to another candidate running for office thought that

anybody who took me seriously as a candidate must be nuts – even though she couldn't fault my platform.

It's understandable. After all, I have no money, no "political experience". But we pushed her to tell us what her problem was. This is what she said:

"You are disabled! You talk with a head pointer and a letter board! You can't be President! Be realistic! I'm a

disability advocate...but this crosses the line! You people can have advisory roles in the background. But you need to be verbal to be President!"

I'm sure that the candidate in question doesn't share the aide's opinion but she speaks on their behalf – and doesn't help their cause.

The good news is, she's in the minority.

When I was born, doctors told my parents I had no intelligence and no future, and that I'd best be put into an institution and forgotten.

I learned from an early age to ignore supposed limits.

The struggle for freedom, against the powers-that-be, has been my life. And it has been a continuous struggle – against schools not letting me in, for example.

I've always been a radical. I was in the first special class to be placed on a high-school campus so disabled students could enjoy mainstream teaching and be part of campus life.

We "disabled" are really the adapters society needs

I was also involved in the civil rights and anti-war movements. This was 1965, before it was popular to be against the Vietnam War. In the school paper I got into a debate with a GI in

Vietnam. I was sat down and told that, because of my political philosophy and activities, I was hurting the chances of the disabled students who'd come after me. I replied that the goal was for rights for disabled people to be equal and complete – including the right to be political.

I would not surrender that or any other right.

I'm not a disabled candidate but a candidate who is "disabled". I believe disability just makes everything more obvious and hence easier to handle. In my art I use "disability" as a tool to address larger issues of humanity, not just "disability" issues.

We "disabled" are really the adapters society needs because we operate outside the boxes of "normalcy", coming up with solutions from left field.

I'm the candidate for everyone who doesn't fit into "normalcy" – which is almost everyone.

The heart of my platform is equal and full access for everyone wanting to realize their potential. This full access will be created by a guaranteed minimum income, a free prenatal-to-the-grave health care system and a free lifetime education system. What I'm advocating is a society of caring.

• www.frankmooreforpresident08.com



FENNELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Report demands action on housing

A new report has called for wide-ranging reforms to housing for disabled people in the Irish Republic.

The Right Living Space, by the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) and the Citizens Information Board (CIB), highlights the need for better policies on housing and support.

It includes calls for more help for disabled people living in residential homes or with their parents; better access to

independent living support; promotion of "lifetime housing" standards for new homes, to ensure minimum disruption if someone becomes disabled; and an increased investment in social housing.

Pictured at the launch in January are (from left): DFI chair Geraldine Clare; environment, heritage and local government minister John Gormley; DFI and CIB board member Martin Naughton; CIB chair Chris Glennon; and CIB chief executive Leonie Lunny.

New bill would strengthen US law

Jewish disability groups have been lobbying the US Congress to tighten anti-disability discrimination laws.

The House of Representatives is considering a bill that would expand the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Jewish Disability Network said 97 per cent of

legal challenges have been lost because courts interpret the act too narrowly.

Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, a disabled adviser at the Religious Action Center, was among those set to meet with members of Congress.

Rabbi Landsberg said: "Leviticus 19:14 teaches us 'not to place a stumbling block before the blind'. There can be no clearer message that we have an obligation to

ensure equal access for all."

The new act would ensure protection for those with conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, hearing impairments, learning difficulties and mental health problems.

Coach thefts spark security fears

People of restricted growth are being smuggled into the luggage holds of long-distance coaches in Sweden by hiding in suitcases.

The thieves, who work for organised gangs, sneak out from their hiding places inside the hold and steal items from travellers' luggage.

One coach company is considering installing video cameras, after reports of several thefts by people of restricted growth.

Footballer barred over impairment

A disabled football player in Botswana was barred from playing in a league match because of his impairment.

Keneilwe Ramokhuwa, who was born with one arm shorter than the other, was told by the referee he could not play for Ramotswa Home Defenders against Mokgosi.

A Referees Commission spokesman said it would apologise to the player and the team for the incident in December.

onetowatch

Swinging Sven

Sven Wexstin is the lead vocalist with Synliga, the Swedish outfit who describe themselves as "The Blindest Band in the Land". As well as establishing themselves in Sweden, they've played across the world from Havana to Tokyo and from Madrid to London. Sven tells us why Mr Magoo is his hero, why all women are beautiful and why he hates being the only sober one in the room

What's the best thing about being disabled?

Being blind I probably don't judge people on looks. Consequently all women are beautiful.

What makes you angry?

In daily life, small things that become difficult, like not being able to tell whether I'm opening a can of corn or a can of olives. More widely, the fact that in 2008 things still aren't set up properly for disabled people.

What's the funniest thing anyone's ever said about your impairment?

Not so much what they've said, but someone once took my cane for a weapon and asked why I'd gone armed to the shopping mall.

How do you deal with people who barf on about your impairment? Do you have any good put downs?

I find they tend to talk to the person I'm with and not to me. So I let them get on with it.

What one thing could be invented to make your life as a disabled person better?

A machine which I turn on in the morning and it zaps me with rays so that I can face anything in the day.

What do you most like about being in the band?

I have a narcissistic tendency, so being the centre of attention.

And what do you not like?

I get fed up playing in pubs where sobriety doesn't necessarily rule and I'm the only sober one in the room.



Armed and dangerous: Sven Wexstin

Who's your favourite disabled person ever?

Mr Magoo because he just gets on and does what he feels like and it works for him.

Do you have any special or hidden talents other than music?

I like to think I have a talent for comedy but it's pretty well hidden.

If you could have another impairment other than the one you have which would it be?

I'd like to lose my sense of smell because then I could eat all those vegetables which are good for me.

• Visit www.synliga.com

→ Who do you think is One to Watch?

Send us your nominations for likely lads and lasses who could answer our 10 questions. They can be rising stars in any field of entertainment, business, the media or beyond

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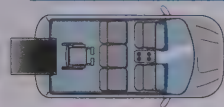
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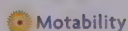


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Blue badge blues

With the government consulting on changes to the blue badge scheme, **Paul Carter** took advantage of a rare opportunity to join police officers on an operation tackling blue badge fraud and misuse

When the call came in, the three of us broke into a run. We were a hundred yards or so away from the car and were not sure whether the driver might have already driven off.

When we reached the Alfa Romeo, there was still no sign of the driver. The car was still displaying the badge that had been reported as stolen.

A council tow-truck was called to remove the car, which was also ticketed.

The driver subsequently appeared at the car pound, and was arrested, while a second stolen badge was found in the boot of the vehicle. He was later found guilty of handling stolen goods and fined £400.

The episode was the highlight of a day spent with the Metropolitan Police on an operation tackling blue badge fraud and misuse.

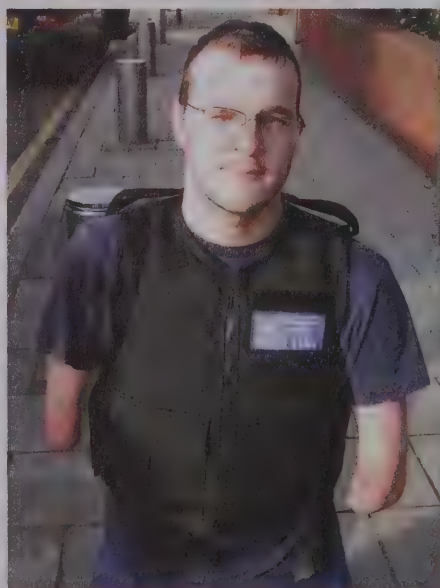
It was a rare opportunity to see how the scheme is operating "on the ground", and how effective the police and traffic wardens' enforcement powers are in practice.

Centred around the Wood Green and Green Lanes areas of Haringey in

north London, Operation Blue Badge saw eight officers patrolling areas known to have a high concentration of vehicles parked with blue badges.

The operation was on two fronts: checking that any badges had not been lost or stolen, and ensuring that those badges were being used by the registered holders.

We teamed up with Inspector Mark



Under a-vest: Paul Carter

Hembury, the Haringey borough safer neighbourhood inspector, who was leading the operation, and our first area of patrol was a residential district close to the main High Road in Wood Green.

It quickly became clear that the way the scheme is run makes it difficult for the authorities to police and enforce efficiently and easily.

Despite eligibility criteria coming from the DfT, the badges themselves are issued by local authorities. For officers to check if a permit is valid, and if it has been lost or stolen, the officer has to telephone the blue badge department of the relevant council. With 32 London boroughs, and some streets containing as many as ten cars displaying badges, this proved time-consuming and frustrating.

Our operation was run in conjunction with the council which, along with some neighbouring boroughs, ensured extra staff were on hand to handle the extra calls; but when contacting councils from further afield, the process did not always run smoothly.

"It is frustrating," says Inspector



Hembury. "We do make neighbouring boroughs aware of the operations but it's not practical to let everyone know."

The government plans to create a national framework for sharing information between agencies, although "not necessarily" a stand alone national database.

A DfT spokesman says a national database is "one of a number of options we are looking at". Despite the obvious gains to the users of the blue badge scheme, he says, there would also be costs to those that run the scheme and questions about data security.

Labour MP Anne Begg, herself a blue badge-user and president of The Blue Badge Network, says. "One of the frustrations and difficulties I have from my point of view as a legislator is that it is not a national scheme. Eligibility is national, but implementation is down to individual local authorities. The reason is that local authorities control their own parking and so on," she says. "I think we should be looking at national enforcement. There's not an easy solution, but I know that The Blue Badge Network is very keen on uniformity."

Another striking fact from the Haringey operation is the sheer number of badges in circulation in such a small area of London – around 7,500 blue badges in Haringey alone – while according to figures from the Department for Transport (DfT), there are now approximately 2.3 million blue badges issued across England, the equivalent of 45 permits

per thousand people.

In 2006/2007, almost 230 were reported stolen in Haringey, an average of more than four a week. Blue badge theft is clearly a major problem.

Inspector Hembury concedes that it is unlikely that thefts of blue badges from vehicles will be eliminated completely. He believes that the most effective tactic would be high visibility enforcement and public awareness, such as initiatives like Operation Blue Badge.

It's difficult enough to catch somebody in the act misusing a badge once, let alone three times

"We want to make it clear that if you're misusing a blue badge in Haringey, you should expect to be stopped and checked," he says.

Perhaps surprisingly, those people who were with the vehicles during the operation were not at all upset by being asked to produce their badges for inspection. In fact, most were happy that the police were tackling the problem, not only of lost and stolen badges, but of misused badges.

Inspector Hembury says: "You'll often get people who say that they're doing the shopping for the badge holder, who's at home. But if the person who the badge is registered to is not in the vehicle, then the badge should not be being used."

Proposals in the new government

consultation include giving traffic wardens and parking attendants the power to confiscate badges.

Police officers have had this power since 2006, but the bureaucratic process after confiscating a badge can prove frustrating.

After confiscating a badge, it is returned to the issuing authority with details of why it was removed. However, some councils operate on a "three strikes" basis before permanently confiscating the badge.

"It's difficult enough to catch somebody in the act misusing a badge once, let alone three times, so it can be quite frustrating," says Inspector Hembury.

There is always the risk, of course, that the legitimate owner of the badge could be unaware of the misuse, for instance by a relative, and therefore become an innocent victim of the confiscation.

Begg says: "I think that on the whole what they are proposing is good, things like giving the power to traffic wardens to confiscate badges, and I think that might make things a lot quicker. At the moment the inspection system operates on a three strikes and out basis. You have to misuse it three times, and of course it should be confiscated (immediately) if it's being misused."

Over the course of the day, seven people were found to be misusing badges, and all of the badges were seized, with fixed penalty notices issued.

As well as the Alfa Romeo driver,



another man was arrested and subsequently cautioned, for using a badge that belonged to his mother, who had died three months previously.

"In many circumstances we would issue a fixed penalty notice where a badge has been misused, but where there has been a prolonged or deliberate attempt to mislead, then we will arrest them for misrepresentation under the Fraud Act as they have been obtaining free parking by deception," says Inspector Hembury.

Another element of the government's "preliminary thinking" is a redesign of the badge itself, creating a "secure and machine-readable badge".

I ask Inspector Hembury if, in his experience, forged or counterfeit badges are a problem, and if measures such as holograms would aid in



Blue collar: the Alfa Romeo being towed away

enforcement. "It's not something that we come across that regularly, certainly not on the scale of the theft of badges from vehicles," he says.

From an observer's perspective, it's difficult to see what real benefits machine readable badges will bring, as the vast majority of badges that were checked on our operation were behind the windscreens of parked, locked cars.

Anne Begg says it is vital that blue badge-users get a better service. They

need the system to have integrity. She adds: "They are the ones who have the problems because of the minority misusing the badges." ■

- The DfT's consultation on its blue badge review runs until 17 April. Visit www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/bluebadgereformstrategy
- The Commons transport committee is also conducting a short inquiry into the blue badge scheme, which it hopes will inform the government's review

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Families torn apart

For disabled parents, having their children taken into care is all too often the first resort for social services, who are failing to offer the right support to keep families together. **Elizabeth Choppin** investigates

Mark Mosley and his wife Deborah, from Walsall, feel like they have had their lives yanked out from under them.

The couple, who have learning difficulties, were devastated when their three children – Hayley, Carol Ann and Christopher – were taken into care almost ten years ago. They were told by social services that it was a child protection matter.

"I still feel very upset. I wish we had received more services," says Deborah (*below*). "Social services is all mouth. They don't follow through with anything except when they say they're going to take your kids away. They follow through with that."

"They said I had no parenting skills and that I didn't know how to bring my children up," adds Mark. He believes more should have been done to keep the family together because he and his wife were never given a chance to fulfil their roles as parents.

According to government policy, disabled parents should be provided with the support needed to bring up their children. In practice, however, this does not always happen.

Statistics published by the Norah Fry Research Centre in 2006 show that 48 per cent of parents with learning difficulties who were interviewed were not looking after their own children.

About 12 per cent of Britain's 14.1 million parents are disabled. They are far more likely to be unemployed and living in low-income households than non-disabled parents.

The grim reality is that many disabled people with children are up against exceptional challenges in the form of lack of support, unfair

assessments, negative assumptions, inaccessible services and in some cases, the break-up of their families.

One of the core issues, say experts, is that many disabled parents do not appear on the radar of support services until the situation has reached a crisis stage.

After the kids went into care, Mark says that social workers "didn't bother with them anymore" or try to reunite the family.

Social services is all mouth. They don't follow through with anything except when they say they're going to take your kids away. They follow through with that

"I never had a chance and I know I'm speaking for a lot of parents who've got the same thing," says Mark. "I've got nothing left to live for, really. It just strips your life of everything."

But statistics show that the Mosleys' circumstances are far from unique.



Philipa Bragman, director of Change, an advocacy group for parents with learning difficulties in Leeds, says that she has never met a parent with learning difficulties who has not been faced with these issues.

Yet the problems are not limited to parents with learning difficulties. Examples of disabled parents struggling to keep their families together arise with alarming frequency.

In January, a teenage mother from Nottingham with mental health issues was embroiled in a legal battle with social services after her baby had been removed from her care hours after he was born – then later returned following a ruling from a high court judge. The baby has now been removed again, pending another court hearing.

Lynn Cook*, from Cheshire, has epilepsy and was limited to seeing her newborn twin boys only 27 hours a week until they were a year-and-a-half old. She has had to fight to receive overnight care so the boys can now be with her.

She says the twins would have been put up for adoption if her sister had not been able to step in and look after the boys for more than a year.

"I felt I was treated unfairly because they weren't giving me the chance to prove that I was fit as a mother," she says.

A woman from Lambeth, who has congenital limb shortening, was so distraught trying to look after her new baby without support from social services that she considered asking a neighbour to report that she was a negligent parent in order to get the help she needed. She took every route available, including asking the Disabled Parents Network (DPN) to write to





Simone Baker with her daughter, Lois, then aged eight

social services on her behalf and also involving a local councillor, all to no avail.

Simone Baker, vice-chair of the DPN and herself a disabled parent, says: "Fairly often, anybody that seeks support, whatever the nature of their impairment, will find that social services seem to wade in from the angle of child protection rather than with the idea that this is a disabled person who requires support in their parenting role."

Disabled parents do often put off asking for help, says Baker, because they are afraid of being judged or of having their children taken away.

A framework of support needs to be put in place for the benefit of disabled parents before their children are born, she insists.

Baker says DPN is constantly made aware of situations where disabled parents are struggling to get help after the birth of their children – and 60 per cent of those calls are from lone parents who only get in touch when things have become too much.

Another issue, says Baker, is that assessments of disabled parents are often based on their needs as a single disabled person, which doesn't properly take into account what help is required after the person becomes a parent.

Constance Reid*, from Preston, has restricted growth and was told that because she was independent before the birth of her son, she wouldn't need help afterwards.

"They had very little experience of disabled parents and they didn't know about the day-to-day issues," she says. "Even though I didn't need support in a lot of areas, there were areas where I really did need it."

It wasn't until Reid contacted her local MP that she was granted two days of care a week. "They wouldn't have considered it otherwise, I really do believe that," she adds.

"Once people get to the stage of not being able to look after their baby is when social services would step in," says Baker. "But a family in tatters is going to cost the government a lot more money than if there had been support from the start."

Experts also say that mainstream services for new parents – such as parent help-lines, baby clinics and parenting support classes – do not have a good record of being accessible to people with a range of access needs.

A family in tatters is going to cost the government a lot more money than if there had been support from the start

Although we asked someone from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services to comment on the issue of support for disabled parents, no-one was available to speak to us.

Alison Woodhead, director of the Mencap Parents Advocacy Project in Walsall, says disabled parents are facing the threat of their families being split up all over the country. "Children's services become involved and it becomes a child protection issue. It's at this point that we're told they need an advocate to understand the issues. But at that point, it's too late and there is very little we can do," she says. It is easy for people to slip through the cracks, she adds.

Parents with mild learning difficulties are especially vulnerable because they will probably not have been eligible for support and therefore will not have been picked up by the system.

"We try to get to families before there are problems," says Woodhead. "We work with health services and any organisation that is working with children and families to make their information accessible. That has helped."

She adds: "Not every parent can look after their child but we try and help where there is a threat to remove them because of their disability. It's an issue of support and not an issue of whether they can be a parent."

New guidelines on the rights of disabled parents from the Department of Health are slowly being recognised, she says, but each region needs an advocacy programme for disabled parents.

"Change is not going to happen without outside pressure," she says.

In 2006, the Social Care Institute for Excellence published a knowledge review on support for disabled parents. Jenny Morris, author of the review, has also been leading the Office for Disability Issues' Independent Living Review and a cross-government Independent Living Strategy, which is expected to be published shortly.

She says: "Disabled parents are one important group that the strategy will cover. We talked to parents to help us develop our policy proposals and they told us how important it is that they get equal access to mainstream services like health visitors and midwives but also about the additional support they might need."

"The Independent Living Strategy will seek to deliver the kinds of things non-disabled people take for granted, and that includes an equal chance to be a parent." ■

* **Not their real names**

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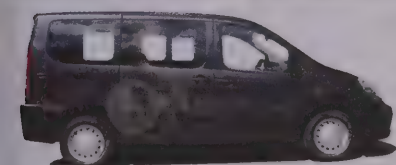
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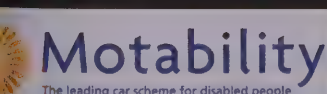
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LOU HAMILTON

Kuljit's cultural mix

He's credited with launching bhangra in Britain. For most musicians, pioneering a musical phenomenon would be enough. **Ian Macrae** discovers there's much more to Kuljit Bhamra than bhangra beats

Check out the range and variety of Kuljit Bhamra's collaborators: Jazz sax ace Andy Shepherd; concert pianist Joanna

McGregor; far-out low-fi new wave band The Auteurs; queen of the Northumbrian pipes Katherine Tickell. And that's not mentioning the galaxy of stars from the Asian and British Asian music scene with whom he's worked.

The list of his stage and screen credits is equally impressive: *Baji on the Beach*, *Bombay Dreams*, *the Far Pavilions* and *Bend It Like Beckham*.

His background, though very different from his chosen path, has also contributed to shaping what he's become. His grandfather was sent from the Punjab to Kenya by the British Raj to supervise the building of imperial railways. Kenya is where Kuljit was born and where, presumably, he took in the rhythms of the East African brand of high energy pop known as "high life" with his mother's milk. When his father came to Britain to formalise his own civil engineering training, Kuljit and his mother went to India where, at the age of one, Kuljit contracted polio.

By the mid 60s, he and his mother had joined his father in England and were living in Southall, west of London. But Kuljit's disability was already joining cultural considerations in shaping what he was to become.

"The immediate worry was 'Who's going to marry him?'" And the immediate answer was, "No-one's going to marry him because no-one's going to give their daughter to someone who's deficient". I eventually did get married at the age of 28 but I spent all that time believing that no-one was going to marry me. I laugh at it now – I've been married twice and had numerous girlfriends – but at the time it was true.

Southall is now one of Britain's most vibrant Asian communities, but back

then it was much more British. And one of the most British institutions in the community was Southall Grammar School, where Kuljit ended up and where he was regarded as different, not just as an Asian, but as a disabled kid in a mainstream school, a rarity then. He was taken along to games sessions in which he could play no part.

"I felt angry that no-one could really deal with me in that way. And I remember thinking, 'I'll show you'. And I still say my success in the music industry has been fuelled by, 'Watch me, I'll show you!' My friends say, 'Oh shut up Kuljit, it's because you're talented and nothing to do with your leg'," he laughs.

A multi-instrumentalist, Kuljit's true virtuosity lies with percussion, and in particular the distinctive sounding tabla. Once again, culture and disability came together to shape a unique way of doing things.

"There's a very rigorous and traditional way of learning and playing tabla. One of the things I couldn't do was sit on the floor cross-legged for hours on end. Now if you see me play I sit on a chair. I used to laugh when I recorded at the BBC when they'd still put out the Persian rug and the joss sticks.

Kuljit started by accompanying his mother, who was a singer much in demand in Sikh temples. But they were increasingly asked to provide the entertainment at weddings once the religious element was over. Kuljit laughs as he remembers how they took control.

"At Punjabi weddings, they'd do the religious ceremony and then the men would go to a pub or working men's club or school hall they'd hired, and drink loads of beer and whisky and eat loads of meat. And the women would be sitting in the kitchen with the bride. I remember my mother saying she wasn't going to sing any more unless

the women could come in the room where the men were partying. Now when you go to Punjabi weddings there's always a dance floor."

Once everyone was in the same room, Kuljit could begin to pursue his goal, getting them to dance.

"I'd take my energy from the room, I'd look at who was tapping their feet and concentrate on their energy. We'd mike the tabla up really loud and my Mum would sing and play the harmonium and we could get people to dance for more than an hour."

I'd take my energy from the room, I'd look at who was tapping their feet and concentrate on their energy

And that was the birth of British bhangra, the phenomenon that was to drive the British Asian music scene for the next 20 years. Next came its refinement. By now Kuljit was listening to and absorbing a whole set of musical influences: the Bee Gees, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, as well as Punjabi folk songs and

Bollywood soundtracks. And it all started to coalesce.

"I realised that if you turned an Indian record up really loud it sounded terrible. If you listened to a Bee Gees record, you had to dance, the groove was so incredible. So I thought the obvious thing to do was to bring those elements of production into Indian music. I didn't create bhangra, bhangra's been around for yonks, but I think what I did was to popularise it."

There's an undoubted snobbery which has kept bhangra from becoming part of what's become known as the world music scene. Almost, says Kuljit, as though something this accessible can't be very good. So he's sought a wider audience via different routes and through his collaborations with western musicians. But he feels he always stays true and anchored to his Indian roots.

"The stuff that I've done that's kind of western, I don't think I've insulted my Indian ethics in it. I'm still keeping those elements alive but somehow trying to infiltrate the western world by saying 'Shut up and listen to this, isn't it amazing'". And he firmly believes that his disability contributes to his being able to follow this uniquely individual path.

"If you've got a disability, are you not already quirky? I can get away with saying things that other people would find it inappropriate to say."

And as he takes up a new role as artistic director of the Society for the Promotion of New Music, all the signs are that he'll continue doing just that. ■

• Visit www.kuljitbhamra.com for more information



LOU HAMILTON



KULJIT BHAMRA

your views



JAMIE TROUNCE

Barred from the web, too

You highlighted the failure of nightclubs to provide information about the accessibility of their venues on their websites (*Disability Now February, Clubbing Together*). But if you're blind or have difficulty using a computer mouse you may find the clubs' websites inaccessible as well. I had a look at the sites listed in your piece and found that they all fail basic accessibility tests.

Thousands of disabled people won't be able to use those websites to find out more about the clubs. While adjustments to buildings can sometimes be tricky and expensive to accommodate, it's relatively simple to make a website accessible to

disabled people. Web designers just need to perform some basic accessibility checks and get some disabled people to try their sites before they go live. All the guidance web designers need has been published in a single report, which is available free from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, entitled *PAS 78: Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites*: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Disability/Pages/Websiteaccessibilityguidance.aspx

Julie Howell, author, *Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites* (BSI, 2006)

Price hikes are making crisis worse

I am with you all the way on winter fuel payments (*Disability Now February, Campaigns*). It is very difficult keeping up payments for gas and electricity. I am with npower and they've just put up the price of gas by 17 per cent.

I live on my own, claim jobseekers allowance (disabled premium), own my own house and try not to use central heating. I pay for gas by payment card every two weeks; npower gets £80 per month from me and I pay £10 to Southern Electric. It is a lot of money to come out of my money when petrol prices and food prices are going up as well. I think we should get help with heating costs, as pensioners do. We've got to keep warm as well.

I had the Warm Front thing done, but I don't think it makes much difference in bringing bills down. I must keep warm but I'm frightened to put the heating on. This government wants everybody to freeze.

Keep up the good work on getting help with heating. Good luck!
D J Golden (address supplied)

Cruising can be bruising

I should like to respond to Marion Webb's letter (*Cruising IS plain sailing, Disability Now February, Your Views*). The last few cruises we have had have been with Royal Caribbean International (RCI). The one to the Baltic Islands was dreadfully disappointing. I had always dreamed of going to Norway but most of the first three days were spent trying to book an accessible taxi to meet us at the dockside. They simply had no idea. Copenhagen was a struggle for my mobility-impaired husband and we returned to the ship, as he was exhausted. When we reached Oslo, we had just come off the ship when an excursion desk rep called to us and said we could hire a wheelchair-accessible van for three hours at a cost of £400, but a guide would cost extra. We declined.

On return to Scotland, I wrote to RCI to say that I thought the charge for accessible transport was extortionate and that none of the non-disabled passengers would be expected to pay that amount for any of the arranged trips. Our next cruise in October has been booked through P&O.
Diane Shaw, retired disability advisor, University of Dundee

Hate: web-links could help



I work in Tameside, Greater Manchester, as a hate crime co-ordinator. I have a specific remit to improve the opportunities for all to report hate crime at third party reporting centres. I have been advocating links from websites to the police to report incidents and we are just about to re-launch our third party centres with training and awareness for staff.

We have links to the council and the libraries are getting involved too. It's about finding as many ways as possible to capture all the information regarding hate and then perhaps we may just raise the profile high enough to get proper and dedicated resources. Many thanks. I will now be a regular reader of your site.

Andy Searle, by email

In despair over hate crime reports

I have read today with horror the hate crimes report on your website. What is going wrong in the UK? It is truly sad that the law seems to fail us all – disabled people in

particular. It seems that not even murder interests the police anymore. When exactly is a hate crime recorded? I despair. I wish you every success with your campaign, but feel powerless to do or say more.

Connie Feller, by email

Oscar's Olympic ban was harsh

Oscar Pistorius's ban from competing in the Olympic Games (*Disability Now February, Sport Now*) seems incredibly harsh to me. The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) ruled that his carbon fibre blades give him a "clear mechanical advantage". Is that not more than offset by the clear disadvantage of having both legs amputated below the knee? If we analyse Oscar's "blades", do we not then have to assess every athlete's running shoes and even his shorts and vest to ensure they give him no advantage?

Spencer Arnott, Holmer Green, Buckinghamshire



OSSUR

Peter's friend could offer some advice

I liked the picture of Peter Hain with Stephen Lloyd accepting a reward in this month's magazine (*Disability Now February, Welfare Reform – are you scared yet?*). Perhaps Stephen would like to offer Mr Hain some advice on filling in forms correctly – and who knows, perhaps help in finding a new job?

Alan Steadman, by email

Supermarkets should clamp down on abuse

Supermarkets should be encouraged to mark their disabled spaces as chargeable to anyone not displaying a valid blue badge, the fee to be exorbitant enough to attract policing by a clamping organisation. A large local garden centre charges £70 for the disabled spaces if no badge is displayed, enforced by clamping.

I note that disabled bays in France carry the legend, "If you take my space please take my disability". This might help trigger the conscience of some drivers. **Mr A J Hoare, Haltwhistle, Northumberland**

→ Have your say

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- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk
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andyrickell



Ripe for investment

It's all very well for government to talk about promoting disabled people's rights, says **Andy Rickell**, but big words need backing up with big money

Having challenged key sectors of society about disablist tendencies, I now challenge government itself. This is a challenge to "government" generally, not the current government particularly, which has promoted disabled people's legal rights well.

But no human right is real until it is resourced. The right to choose and control one's support, to participate in society or get a job can only be exercised when the resources required for that right are funded and provided appropriately.

No government has yet agreed that resourcing such rights is a right in itself. Politicians are not yet ready to persuade voters that additional state funding for disabled people is justified on moral grounds, let alone economic grounds.

To view disabled people's support as a state burden is prejudiced: hence the Treasury is being disablist.

The Treasury has overseen economic policy failures

that include worsening disability poverty and inequality without addressing the state weaknesses that have caused them.

It has also ignored multi-billion pound bureaucratic waste caused by costly and cumbersome assessment procedures.

To view disabled people's support as a state burden is prejudiced: hence the Treasury is being disablist

At the same time, the Treasury has overseen piecemeal welfare reform which labelled disabled people sick-note scroungers and is now the driving force behind the reform of social care reform for cost reasons.

The Treasury should view disabled people as equally worthy of state investment as non-disabled people. It accepts that for non-disabled people, the costs of maintenance, education and skills training are more than recovered through the tax paid during people's

working lives, with enough left to pay for pensions and support in old age.

But this "invest to save" approach is not the model adopted for disabled people and their families. And so while disabled people get some resources to acquire education and skills, this is often not enough to gain paid or voluntary work and to contribute economically.

Similarly, working-age, unpaid family "carers" have their access to paid work undermined by inadequate state support for disabled relatives, and child "carers" are denied full development opportunities. These failures waste human potential, are economically unsound and deny human rights to many disabled and non-disabled people.

The powerful Treasury should be "kicking butt" across all tiers of government about the bureaucratic mess generated by piecemeal development of disabled

people's state support. And that doesn't mean getting rid of disability living allowance to pay for "social care"! If anything, it should be the other way round!

Currently, the Treasury is not represented on the ministerial group (chaired by the minister for disabled people) that oversees implementation of the *Life Chances* report.

Given the Treasury's power within government and the need to justify disabled people's rights to appropriate resources, the Treasury should be sitting at this ministerial table.

Most importantly, disablist attitudes within government circles about disabled people being a "burden" on the state must change. Our lack of equal citizenship in socio-economic terms is society's lost asset. We are ripe for investment.

• Andy Rickell is an executive director at Scope

→ Have your say

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q Could you please tell me what direct payments are for and who to contact about them? I have asthma, angina and arthritis. I cannot make a meal or do my own washing, ironing, and many other household chores. I have a launderette collect and do my washing. I also have meals on wheels several times a week and need someone to help me with curtains, gardening, bed-making, etc. Are any of these covered by direct payments?

Ms T Webster, Blackpool

AB: Direct payments are cash payments to individuals who have been assessed as needing personal social services. They give people more choice and control over the services they receive, to help them live independently in their own homes. The amount paid is based on the estimated costs of the service the individual needs minus any personal contribution that might be required by the

council. The individual can use the cash to pay for the service required, for example engaging a personal assistant. An individual in need of services does not have to accept direct payments. The key element is choice.

They are now available to: disabled adults aged 18-64 who have been assessed as eligible to receive community care services; disabled people over 64; parents of disabled children; disabled young people aged 16-17; and carers aged 16 or over who provide substantial care for someone 18 or over (except in Scotland).

Since April 2003, it has been mandatory for all local authorities to offer the choice of direct payments to all eligible recipients.

If Ms Webster would like to receive direct payments instead of some of the services she is currently receiving she should discuss this with her local adult care services. She could spend the money on help with shopping, and keeping her

garden tidy, even though these are not services normally provided as part of social care. The downside would be that she would have to give up some of the services that she is already receiving, unless she can persuade adult services to re-assess her as needing more care. She may also wish to check that she is getting all the benefits she is entitled to. These are separate from direct payments, although the council may take some of the benefits into account when assessing any charges they make.

Q My wife uses a wheelchair and we have a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. Her manual wheelchair is secured by an adjustable belt restraint system, which fastens round the chair, both at front and rear. As we both become older and not so strong, we have decided the time has come to buy a powered chair. While there is an

abundance of them on the market, there is a big problem finding one to which the vehicle restraint belt system will attach. The sales people just look blank when I point this out.

Surely it is as necessary to secure a power chair in the vehicle as the manual one?
AW Bentley, Stoke on Trent

EP: The fact that you have encountered sales people who have no idea of the acceptable uses of the wheelchairs they provide is, frankly, scandalous. It is absolutely imperative that any wheelchair (and occupant) is adequately restrained within a private vehicle and any failure to do this is a major safety risk.

Although a powered wheelchair may look heavier and more stable, the weight and forces within a private vehicle mean it would shift or tip even at very low speeds.

Your current vehicle has a belt restraint system, which is likely to be a four point

type commonly used in private wheelchair-accessible vehicles. I assume that if your wife travels in her wheelchair, rather than transferring to a passenger seat, there is an appropriate lap and diagonal seatbelt, fitted to coincide with the positioning of the wheelchair. Powered wheelchairs offered for sale should have clear labelling showing whether they can be used in transportation, whether a specific or restricted range of wheelchair tie-down and occupant restraint system should be used and the location points for tie-downs or restraints. Reputable wheelchair suppliers should be able to provide this information and it is worth contacting the British Healthcare Trades Association for details of members in your area: www.bhta.net or ring 020 7680 4048. You should also contact the converter of your vehicle to check the type of restraint system fitted and whether there are any restrictions on its use. They should also provide information on any necessary modifications.

When you've located a suitable wheelchair supplier and checked with your vehicle converter, it is still really important to make sure your chosen wheelchair is compatible with your vehicle. The only way to do this is by trying it out in your vehicle before you buy it.

There are many other factors to be considered when buying a powered wheelchair. Two useful guides, *Choosing a Powered Wheelchair* and *Out and About with your Wheelchair*, are available from the Disabled Living Foundation: visit www.dlf.org.uk or ring 0845 130 9177.

Many Mobility Centres offer advice for passengers travelling in wheelchairs and may be able to offer your wife a detailed assessment. Visit www.mobility-centres.org.uk or ring (freephone) 0800 559 3636 for details of your local centre or further advice.

The Medical Devices Agency has issued detailed guidance on transporting wheelchairs – DB2001 (03) – www.mrha.gov.uk and there is a shorter version at www.independentliving.co.uk/legis7.html

→ If you have a question for our panel

- phone us 020 7619 7323
- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

RELATIONSHIPS

SIMON PARRITT

Simon is a chartered counselling psychologist who has also studied psychosexual therapy. He was the only disabled director of the former Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with a Disability (SPOD).

FINANCE

DAVID CLARKE

David has spent 14 years in the banking industry and has worked for three leading financial service providers. He is a senior partner of Clydesdale Bank.

PROPERTY

KATE SHEEHAN

Kate is a director of Better Living and an occupational therapist with 20 years' experience and a passionate interest in housing. Better Living works with manufacturers to meet the needs of the ageing population.

LEGAL & BENEFITS

LINDA CLARKE

Linda is director of Disability Law Service (DLS). DLS is the only service controlled and managed by disabled people that offers free legal advice to disabled people, families and carers.

EQUIPMENT

JOHN MANDRAK

John, who is blind, has worked for nearly 25 years as a disability journalist and consultant. He is an adviser on the Disabled Living Foundation's helpline.

TRAVEL

ANDY WRIGHT

Andy is the disabled managing director of Accessible Travel, a tour operator providing holidays for people with mobility impairments.

MOTORING

ED PASSANT

Ed is chief executive of the Forum of Mobility Centres. The centres provide driver and passenger assessment for disabled people.

MONEY, LEGAL & BENEFITS

ALAN BARTON

Alan is a social policy adviser for Citizens Advice, and an adviser at Rickmansworth Citizens Advice Bureau.

PROPERTY & CONSUMER

BARRY CASHIN

Barry is a disabled columnist and editor who writes for newspapers and magazines on property and consumer issues.

backchat

Our unhealthy DWP obsession



Backchat would not like to be seen to be

obsessed with our friends in the Department for Worthless Promises (sorry... Department for Work and Pensions) press office.

They do try, bless them. But sometimes, you wonder if they really are as desperate to help their close pals in the disability media as they could be.

One recent example: the DWP has hired banker David Freud to offer advice on helping people off benefits and into work. Mr Freud has already implied that many current claimants are workshop fraudsters.

But the DWP press office seemed strangely reluctant to source a picture of Mr Freud for us. In fact, they seemed strangely reluctant to deal with our request at all.

Surely they're not embarrassed about their latest recruit?

Fishing for PR compliments among the mixed metaphors



Backchat's regular reader will know there is little that tickles this column's fancy more than a few choice mixed metaphors.

So it was with a growing sense of elation that Backchat read a press release from Shaw Trust about a "miracle working fisherman".

The man's life was turned around, apparently, after he contacted Shaw

Trust, following ten years on benefits.

After finding himself on a "scrap heap" and both "at the end of his tether" and "lower than a snake's belly", he is now helping "shoals of troubled youngsters" turn their own lives around.

One can only congratulate our fisherman on cutting himself free from his tether, finding his way down from the scrap heap and then directing the shoals of troubled young fish from the water's edge.

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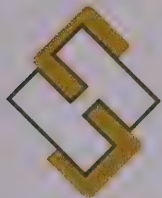
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Sussex Health Care



Rapkyns Care Centre, Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex

Beech Lodge, Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex

Norfolk Lodge, Horsham, West Sussex

Redwood House, Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex



Sussex Health Care is an award winning group of care homes that were founded in 1985. Sussex Health Care now operate 15 care homes, predominantly in the West Sussex area, providing nearly 450 beds, incorporating specialist care provision as well as care for older people. Sussex Health Care currently have vacancies in two of our care homes:



Rapkyns Care Centre opened 2 new bungalows in January 2007. The home is based in Broadbridge Heath and caters for young people with complex and multiple needs. The home is comprised of three bungalows for ten people and one for eleven which are purpose built and fully accessible for wheelchairs. Each single room provides en-suite facilities and track hoisting is available throughout. There is one bed available for respite care. There is a day centre on site with swimming pool and IT suite. Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy are available to service users as is 24 hour nursing care. A Speech and Language Therapist is also employed.

Beech Lodge is a purpose built bungalow which provides two wings of 10 bedrooms all with en-suite facilities providing care for young adults with multiple and complex needs. The registered care home with nursing has been equipped with all the latest technological aids and provides a safe, comfortable, homely environment for our service user's. Person centred planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service user's needs and wishes at the centre of our service. Our philosophy is to provide the very best care in a safe and comfortable environment whilst respecting service user's rights to live as normal a life as possible.

Sussex Health Care also currently have residential vacancies in two of our care homes:

Both **Norfolk Lodge** and **Redwood House** have been skilfully converted to accommodate 8 people in each home and offer's a specialised residential environment for adults with learning disabilities who may also present with moderately challenging behaviour. Person centred planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service users needs and wishes at the centre of our service. Our philosophy is to provide the very best care in a safe and comfortable environment whilst respecting service user's rights to live as normal a life as possible.

In 2008 the group are developing 2 new purpose built facilities

Beechcroft Care Centre, West Hoathly Road, East Grinstead.

This service will provide 2 purpose built 10 bedded bungalows with track hoisting throughout and en-suite facilities to all rooms for people with physical and learning disabilities. The home will also have its own hydrotherapy pool and a separate swimming pool. Trained nurses, keyworkers and physiotherapists will be available over a 24 hour period. This service is due to open in May 2008.

Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead.

This service will provide a purpose built residential service with 24 hour nursing support for people with acquired brain injury and neurological conditions. This service is due to open in May 2008.

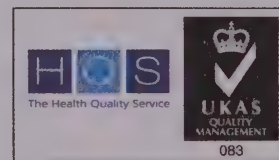
For further information

Please contact Corrine Wallace, Head of Specialist Care Services and Future Development,

Tel: (01403) 217338 • Fax: 01403 210424 • email: corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.org • web: www.sussexhealthcare.org



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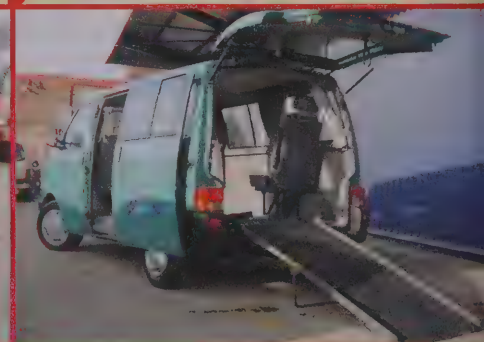
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Becoming **positively** human

It's time the government stopped discriminating against women in HIV screening policies, says **Alice Welbourn**

I have probably had HIV for 19 years. Until I was diagnosed, when happily pregnant in 1992, I was blissfully unaware of this bug I have in my body. That's the same for 1/3 of all the 70,000 people with HIV in the UK – they have no idea that they have it because they are probably fit and well and totally unaware of the timebomb ticking away inside them. The only outward signs of my damaged immune system were three shingles attacks, which responded quickly to treatment, during the late nineties. Even eight years ago, in March 2000, when I had to start taking anti-retroviral drugs religiously for the rest of my life, I swam 2.5 kilometres easily for Shelter without any need to train.

Nowadays, we hear little about HIV in Britain because people assume that, since the life-saving drugs arrived in the mid 90s, it's been cured. Wrong. Clinically, HIV may be a long-term condition rather than a death sentence, but many – not me luckily – still

have nasty on-going side-effects from the strong drugs. With the right medical attention during pregnancy, there is now under two per cent chance of parents passing HIV to their baby. So, many healthy children have been born. But discrimination against us all is still high, which is why we keep so quiet about it. In the UK, 60 per cent of new diagnoses are now heterosexually acquired. New diagnoses doubled between 2000 and 2005.

As in the UK, there is a global "slag" versus "stag" attitude around sex

Women account now for over 40 per cent of these. All shocking figures but unsurprising, given Britain's overall lack of information or support around sexual health. Our children still have scandalously inadequate sex, relationships, alcohol and other drugs education in school, as recent reports

from Girl Guides, the Red Cross and the YWCA testify.

This year marks 60 years since the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The Elders, including Mary Robinson and Nelson Mandela, are highlighting different themes. The March theme is that "every woman has human rights". Globally, women especially face discrimination when they test positive. As in the UK, there is a global "slag" vs "stag" attitude around sex. Women are targeted by health ministries for HIV testing during pregnancy, to avoid transmission to their babies. Great in principle, but since women are often the first in a family to get tested, they are frequently attacked on the – usually false – assumption that they must have been cheating. (UNAIDS says that married women are more vulnerable to HIV than single women.)

So if you want to have a child, please go with your partner to be tested together, before conceiving. Then, you can still have healthy children, but can avoid the shock of diagnosis during pregnancy. Just imagine, wouldn't it be great for our government to uphold women's rights in relation to HIV this year and change its HIV testing policy away from targeting pregnant women. Wouldn't it be great if all of us upheld HIV positive people's rights this year and changed our attitudes towards yet another disability which has deeply touched so many.

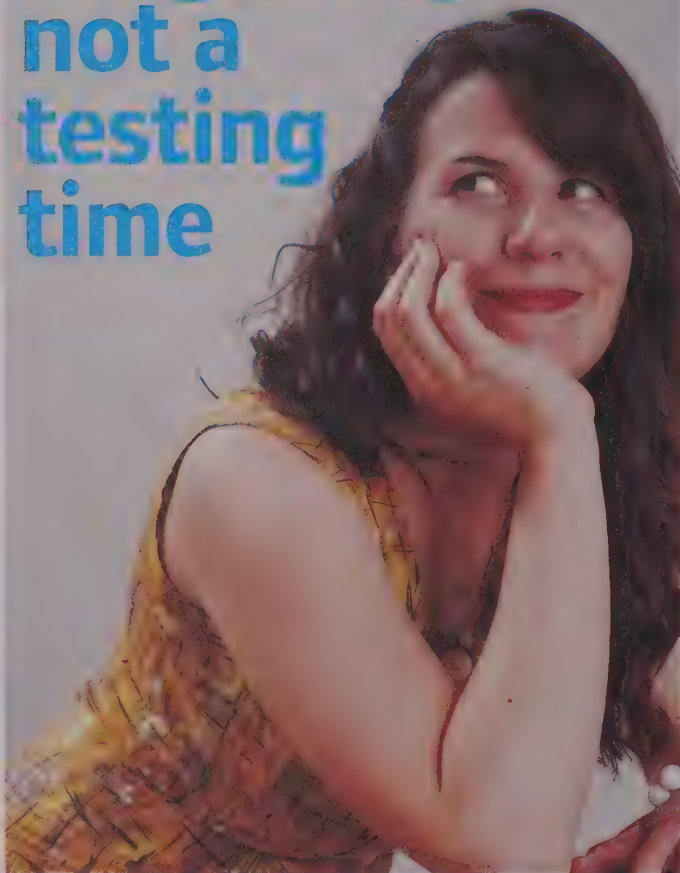
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upclose&personal

Pregnancy's not a testing time



Mother-to-be **Rebecca Atkinson** (above) explains her decision not to screen her unborn baby

You're pregnant! Stand back and await the unsolicited tummy tickles from strangers and the remarks that you are "freakin' massive!" from old friends. Everyone is free to poke and ask and wonder. Have you had morning sickness? How much weight have you gained? Do you want a boy or a girl?

Questions, questions,

questions. But if, like me, you are a disabled mother-to-be, there'll be one more question loitering in the larynx of well-meaning inquirers. What people really want to know is whether that rogue of a gene that caused my impairment has tumbled from one generation to the next, "afflicting" my unborn child with more than just my genetic predisposition

for being bad-tempered or having a big nose.

The answer is that while it's possible, it's extremely unlikely. I've got Usher syndrome, a rare genetic condition that causes partial deafness from birth and gradual sight loss in adulthood.

The condition is caused by a recessive gene, which means that for my child to be affected my partner would have to be unknowingly carrying the gene too. Scientists are still identifying the gene or genes thought to cause Usher syndrome, so screening my partner or our unborn baby is not currently an option.

But would I screen if I could? And if I could, what would I do with that information? Would I not have children if my partner was a carrier? Would I terminate a pregnancy just because the baby was... well, like me? Would I have IVF embryo screening to ensure only "healthy" embryos were implanted?

Would I terminate a pregnancy just because the baby was like me?

The answer is no – because to do so would be to say that a life like mine is less worthy and desirable

than a "normal" life, when in my view (and who better to judge "quality of life" than someone living that life), while living with a dual sensory loss can be limiting and frustrating, it is not a lesser life, just a different and equally valid way of being.

But this is all hypothetical, right? There are no tests for Usher syndrome. So what about the ever-increasing pre-natal tests that are on offer? At 12 weeks pregnant I was offered screening for Down's syndrome. I turned it down because having decided that I wouldn't be willing to test for or terminate my own impairment, why would it be right to test for another?

Surely, if I feel it's wrong to stratify the value of a "normal" life over and above mine, then I must extend that belief to all impairments, not just the one I know about because I have it myself.

When it comes to abortion, I'm a pro-choice feminist. I believe in women's right to control their reproductive destiny. But as a disabled woman and a mother-to-be, I can't help asking: should we really have the right that pre-natal screening affords us to decide what "type" of baby does or doesn't get to inhabit the world?

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E & OE

The Tanni&Anni clothing range may be aimed at disabled people, but it replicates high street style and price, says **Annie Makoff**

Where would you expect to find a new, up-and-coming clothing range, exclusively designed for disabled followers of fashion? In London? Manchester? Or how about Milan? Actually, Tanni&Anni is neatly tucked away in Leek, Staffordshire. It is an Aladdin's cave of specialised clothing. Clothing, which, according to fashion designer and director, Annabel McMahon, replicates high street brands while being tailored for disabled people.

Take the elegant trench coat for wheelchair-users: it could just as easily have been a familiar brand for the average consumer. But, as Annabel explains, 'the difference is in the detail'. The coat is made up in sections, which enable a wheelchair-user to slip into it without needing to tuck the bottom underneath them. It simply attaches neatly at the back, and once fastened



Tailor made for the great outdoors



Designs for life: Annabel McMahon (left) and Dame Tanni

looks like any other trendy garment.

But Annabel insists that her range is not solely for wheelchair-users: "We have customers who have autism, we have customers who have learning disabilities." She says: "They all use different products to the wheelchair-users so it's a broad range of solutions that we offer."

And even the prices for such a specialised collection are comparable with the likes of Gap, Next or Marks & Spencer.

The range materialised from the success of Rackety's, the adaptive clothing range for children. When demand for an adult range grew, retired Paralympic athlete and Rackety's co-director, Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson, and Annabel McMahon put their heads together and came up with Tanni&Anni at Rackety's.

Annabel, who previously worked for a knitted-garment manufacturing company and for a company designing an array of glitzy dressing-up costumes for children, had no initial experience in adaptive clothing. Never one to be put off, she approached the challenge with

There hasn't been anything like this until now that allows disabled people to dress in the way they want. It's very exciting

an open mind. "I had no preconceived ideas about what you shouldn't do. I had no history of OTs telling me it's got to be like this or got to be like that," she says. Annabel's motivation was choice and variation: she wanted to create clothes that gave back the

choice factor to the disabled customer.

Yet despite a society steeped in consumer culture, there appeared to be a lack of adaptable clothing for the average disabled person. Annabel was determined to address what she saw as a gap in the market.

This first collection is predominantly an outdoor range for a variety of occasions with a "sporty" theme. The sports jackets, available in navy or cream, are ideal for colder temperatures, and come in two half sections, attaching with Velcro at the back. There are stylish leg-warmers for the wheelchair-user, as well as hugely-successful popper vests which come in a variety of colours. More designs and more exciting concepts are on the way, and maybe even more cheeky slogans for the label's Get The Message t-shirts, which carry slogans



such as, "Wicked on wheels" or "Don't stare, I know I'm cool!"

Dame Tanni believes the t-shirt collection to be "gently confrontational". She told The Stirrer, a Birmingham website, that the range "is a good way of changing people's perception of disability". She said: "There hasn't been anything like this until now that allows disabled people to dress in the way they want. It's very exciting." And exciting it is, for even those who model the clothes

challenge public perceptions. They are shown in their element: they are active, confident and they show the clothes at their very best.

"The clothes don't always look styled as they might in other modelling situations," Annabel says, "but we wanted to reflect them as accurately as possible, worn by people getting on with their lives." And clothes that reflect this kind of optimism are surely worth shouting about. ■

→ More information

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An Engaging idea

A new television production company is hoping to open up the industry to people with learning difficulties. **Sunil Peck** reports

A television production company run by and for people with learning difficulties is set to increase on-screen opportunities for disabled people. Engage TV is in negotiations with mainstream channels to develop programme and series ideas. It will also hold training workshops to equip people with learning difficulties with the technical and production skills to create their own films and TV programmes. It wants to gain the funding to open its own TV channel in the next three to four years.

Andy Stafford, an actor with learning difficulties from Gateshead's Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company, is optimistic that Engage TV will create more media opportunities for disabled actors.

"If someone from Channel 4 or BBC1 sees someone with a disability in a drama, they might think, 'hang on, we are doing a play and we need someone with a learning difficulty. That person would be ideal for the part.'"

Charly Conquest (pictured



above with Andy Stafford), project manager at Engage TV, says: "This is about opening up possibilities to a community with plenty of creative ideas and talent, but who don't get the same opportunities." She adds: "The television that is out there already is made by industry professionals without much consultation with the community that they are trying to reach."

The company is based in Newcastle but Conquest is "throwing the channel out to as many people as possible". She is particularly keen to see films shot by people around the UK which could

be broadcast. The channel has not been publicised outside the north-east, but Conquest has already had calls from self-advocacy groups in Derby and the south-east of England itching to get involved.

The idea for Engage TV developed after discussions between a film company and the Lawnmowers theatre company to produce a magazine-style DVD.

Engage TV will air documentaries and current affairs programmes and is developing the "world's first learning disabled feature film". But Conquest says that the flagship programme will be a soap opera.

"The way we are going' about creating it is 10 weeks of script development workshops. We are going to get people to watch other soap operas and develop characters and dialogue."

A scriptwriter who has worked on *Emmerdale* and *Byker Grove* will also attend to give script advice.

Conquest says that Engage TV will broadcast pre-recorded programmes at first, but she hopes that they will eventually be able to afford a studio and the cameras to broadcast live. The channel has received local funding but Conquest is anxious to drum up revenue from sponsorship and advertising.

Transitions, the channel's first production, tackling the issues facing young adults with learning difficulties, is scheduled to be available online in the spring.

• **For more information, email Charly Conquest at charly@engagetv.co.uk**

→ CONTACT US

Do you know of an innovative, small-scale, pilot project, ideally one run by disabled people themselves?

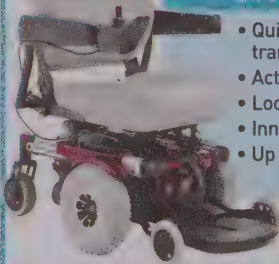
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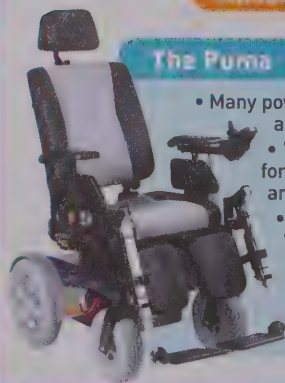
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Mushing down the mountain

Verite Reily Collins and her family checked out a dog sled race while on holiday in the Alps, and got caught up in the fun, the fur and the frenzy

Each January, the area around Mont Blanc in the Alps hosts La Grande Odysée, a ten-day race for mushers and dogs from around the world. We thought it would be interesting to go for a day during our winter holiday – and found ourselves caught up in the fun. Riding a sled to the top of a mountain, lunching with the crack French Regiment of Chasseurs Alpins, spattered with snow as we watched

sleds race through villages, we shared the highs and lows of the mushers.

The big dog sled events in Canada and the States are run across vast snowy wastes, but here the teams race through the valleys and villages, so you are close to the excitement, even watching from a café. We soon made friends with locals who knew exactly which village was offering hot chocolate, or who was doling out mulled wine.

Getting there was easy; Michael

Birtles of European Rail arranged rail travel via Eurostar, staff to meet us at stations with slick wheelchair ramps, ready-waiting taxis, and apartments with easy access. Some of us stayed in hotels, and again tourist boards are incredibly helpful, and can fit activities to whatever you want to do. Alpine people believe you can do what you want – even climb mountains (although in our case the tourist office arranged for us to go up in cable cars).

Dog sledding is suitable for everyone, however disabled – you stand on the rear runners of the sled, or sit inside and glide along. The French are big dog lovers and all across the Alps there are local kennels where visitors can spend an hour or a day. Dog teams are used to autistic, blind and disabled “mushers” – welcoming anyone who gives them a cuddle.

Watching the racing, we shared hot sausages with locals on the snowy slopes, and soon realised if we had lost a kid they were either helping (hindering) the mushers harness up the dogs, or had gone off with their new “ami” without worrying about us. ➔



RHONE-ALPES TOURISM



Snow patrol: one of the teams of huskies in last year's Grande Odysée (and above right)

Did you know?

Europe's largest dog sled rally takes place every year at Aviemore in Scotland, when more than 200 teams enter. They run on wheeled rigs if there is no snow.

The communities are very close-knit, and if the worst should happen and someone gets lost, meeting Vincent Martin and his massive search dog Gino, we understood that the locality takes safety very seriously.

We had heard how "user-friendly"

dog sledding is, but never imagined it would be so exciting. On one of the best days we watched a massed start with more than 300 dogs lined up straining in harnesses, desperate to get going and out-run their rivals. The noise was ear-splitting and we were left breathless as dogs and sleds raced off down the valley. All afternoon we followed the race through tiny villages, marvelling at how the dogs managed to steer through narrow streets and over bridges, up banks and across fields.

As the days progressed our little group began to talk knowledgeably

about calories the dogs needed (6,000 a day), how teams wear little booties to protect paws if the going is rough, and how the Europeans were winning against the heavily-sponsored entries from North America.

Americans, Alaskans and Canadians had come over in force. They are the experts, with the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest races offering millions in prize money, and sponsorship taking them into the footballers' pay league, and flew over with teams of 14 dogs each. Taking part requires grit, determination and incredible fitness;



enough strength in your arms to guide dogs over the finish line.

Eventually, a Swede, Petter Karlsson, raced through flaming flambeau lining the finish to win, followed by Emil Inauen (Switzerland) and Ketil Reitan (Norway).

We had meant to stay a few days, then come home via EuroDisney. The kids vetoed that so we moved over to La Moulin de Marie Hotel in Lanslebourg, to be right in the middle of the French festivities, and try out the Dahut Restaurant in Val Cenis. Now this is serious eating – proving a confident chef can produce the most delicious meal out of nothing more than top quality meat, fish and

Dog sledding is suitable for everyone, however disabled – you stand on the rear runners of the sled, or sit inside and glide along

RHONE ALPES TOURISM

vegetables cooked simply – but just sublime. Jean Noel Brunel loves to talk food, and during the truffle season will be in the middle of earnest discussions on the merits of black or white truffles, but for visitors like us with picky children he provided an instant hit with hot stones on which we could cook ready-prepared fish and meat of a melt-in-the-mouth quality.

The day we went up the mountain, picked up sleds and were whisked up to the mountaintop to lunch with the Chasseurs Alpins was another highlight. Met at the cable car by Balto and his fellow huskies, we took off in different sleds according to ability, and went across the mountains up to the “barracks” of the Chasseur Alpin, where Capt Bernard Virelaude gave us a fascinating talk in English about the life of this crack



regiment, just back from serving in Bosnia and Afghanistan. All arranged by the tourist board, and voted uber-cool by the kids.

Husky activities continue year-round; our group were told that in summer they can go Husky-hiking – a dog is harnessed up to a line around the waist, and can help pull a hiker gently up steep slopes. And no, it’s not cruel; these dogs are far too strong to be made to do anything against their will. Mountain communities live outdoors with swimming pools, kayaking and other sports tailored for disabled people, and wonderful food. And just down the valley is the spa town of Brides-les-Bains; heaven for stressed-out mums!

Our group have grand plans to return next year and get their husky driving diploma; we shall see... ■

imagine running a marathon every day, steering a team of excitable dogs, lifting your sled every time it sticks in snowdrifts, harnessing frantic dogs who won’t stand still, and still having

Did you know?

During the First World War, the French Army had more than 8,000 sled dogs. Italians, Germans, Austrians and other armies also used them. Sled dogs only need four words of command: Go, stop, left and right.

→ More information

Race: www.lagrandeodysee.com

Regional tourism:

www.rhone-alpes-tourisme.com

Apartments:

www.champeryvacances.com

Travel: www.eraill.co.uk

Local tourism/hotels:

www.hautemaurienne.com

Photos of Balto and other huskies:

www.husky-adventure.net



NIGEL BOWLES/REX FEATURES

Flying into trouble

Nicola Naylor didn't think travelling without airport assistance, but with the help of her daughter Poppy, was too much to ask. How wrong she was

It was to be liberating for me and exciting for my six- nearly seven-year-old daughter. We planned to fly to France to visit relatives but decided not to book any airport assistance as I usually do because I am blind. We both thought that Poppy was a good enough reader to decipher the computerised screens and to work out our way through the maze of baggage and passport control to find the gate, departure lounge and the inevitable chocolate muffin stop.

Our journey out to Bergerac ran very smoothly. I had explained the sequence of events to expect following check-in at an airport and what signs to look out for. Poppy was feeling very grown-up and proud of herself by the time we successfully sat ourselves down in the coffee bar by the departure gate. As a veteran traveller, I have traipsed through airports trying to be friendly and appreciative with my groundstaff guides. At last I was enjoying the privacy of being a *deux* with my



Not a priority: Nicola and Poppy

daughter and the freedom of stopping, sitting, and wandering as we wanted.

It was the return journey that put an end to our successful, independent travel. We were waiting to board, but waiting that bit too long. The lounge was becoming crowded and the mood restless. Then came the dreaded announcement that our Southampton flight had been cancelled.

There were six places left on a flight leaving for Birmingham immediately. Further seats were available for a flight to Manchester, but only after a delay of seven hours, or passengers were to be

accommodated in Bergerac overnight. We were then invited to step forward if we wanted the Birmingham flight.

There was a sudden surge of people towards the desk, swarming like bees around a honey pot, with fit young men jostling and pushing to the front. Poppy would not even have been tall enough to poke her head over the counter, let alone survive the scrum.

It took a moment, but I managed with Poppy's help to get the attention of a member of staff who was not already sucked under. I explained that I could not see and that the change in travel arrangements meant that I now needed more help than Poppy could give. I also said that being blind and alone with a small child meant that it would be more difficult to stay overnight in a hotel. Nor did I want to arrive late at night in Manchester when I lived in London. I therefore requested that we be given seats on the Birmingham flight as a priority.

By the time this information was

conveyed to the staff allocating seats, the seats for Birmingham were taken on a first come first served basis. It was survival of the fittest. I was astounded, not least because in the normal course of events, priority passengers are put first. Priority passengers are those with children, disabilities or the very elderly. Even if the staff could claim that they did not know soon enough that I was blind, they could see that there were only two children on the passenger list and should have given priority on that basis alone.

At the time, and long before the Birmingham flight departed, I was assertive with the staff about how much more difficult it would be for me to arrive late at night in Manchester and that they should reallocate the seats to Birmingham with a view to getting the people with the greatest

need home soonest. What I got was a seven-hour wait, flights to Manchester, confusion, queuing and further delays at Manchester, and finally onward flights arriving in Southampton around

I was astounded, not least because in the normal course of events, priority passengers are put first

11pm. My little guide resigned at some point on her journey through boredom, grumpiness, exhaustion and into sleep. It was only with bullish determination that I persuaded the airline that they should pay for a taxi to take us to London rather than expect us to get a train at nearly midnight.

After a formal complaint, the airline offered us a credit note but said that

they operated a first come first served policy when offering alternative travel arrangements. They also said that in my case "no priority assistance was pre-booked". It is therefore unclear as to whether a disabled person must book assistance regardless because, if not, in the event of an unexpected problem, they will not be given priority help. Or does the first come first served policy mean that there is no point in registering your disability because you won't be first in the bun fight anyway? Travellers beware! ■

• **Jasmine and Arnica, Nicola**
Naylor's book on travelling alone through India and learning about alternative healing, is published by Eye Books, priced £9.99, and is available from all good bookshops and www.eye-books.com

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tried & tested

DAB – radio with knobs on

It's now possible to pause and rewind live radio, so you no longer have to miss a second of your favourite show. **Ian Macrae** checks out two sets. Did they press his buttons?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) brought with it a number of benefits. More stations meant greater variety and niche listening; claims of CD quality sound which, though not always entirely accurate did mean an end to hiss and crackle on stations like Radio Five Live and Virgin; and the ability to manipulate radio in much the same way as you can TV on systems such as Sky Plus. The doorbell goes just as Poirot is about to unmask the villain in the BBC7 dramatisation. No worries. Just hit pause and you don't miss a thing. Or your attention wandered just as Chris Moyles was delivering his most brilliant bon mot. Just hit re-wind and crank the audio back to hear it again.

But the DAB revolution also brought with it a supreme irony. The medium which had been accessible and easy to use for almost everyone suddenly got

hijacked. Choosing a station was no longer a case of cruising up and down the dial. Information was presented textually on the screen. Controls required the ability to twist and push in combination. Other functions were hidden deep in a system of menus.

But we're not easily robbed of one of life's necessities. Many disabled people were determined not to let the technology exclude us so we set about finding our own ways of reclaiming radio so that we could share in the benefits some sets afford.

Two with the most functionality are the **RD 41 Sound** from Roberts Radio and Pure's high-end model from its Evoke range, the **Evoke 3**. This could easily be seen as a contest between solid experience and impetuous youth. Roberts have been making radios now for well over 50 years. As it comes out of the box, the Roberts looks

reassuringly familiar and solidly reliable. However, the Evoke does more than stand up to it, showing why Pure has become one of the market leaders in DAB radio production and sales.

Following switch-on and the obligatory autotune scan, the RD41 proved disappointingly poor at pulling in a signal, even struggling with strong stations in my area like Radio 2, Five Live and Classic FM. And the thing with DAB is that poor reception results in no broadcast sound. In exactly the same setting and position, the Evoke 3 performed far better and ran away with this element of the test. The Pure was also the clear winner when it comes to number and use of presets, allowing for 99 – more than there are stations

available currently – while the Roberts weighed in with a puny six. And because the Evoke has a remote, choosing and switching between presets is very easy as you simply punch in the number of the preset you want. In fact, the remote made for greater ease of operation all round, which meant the Pure won out here too.

Things are evened up slightly on visual displays. The Evoke's is not great, small text in pale green on an off-white background. The Roberts, with strong large white text contrasting well with a blue background, is much more vision-impaired friendly.

Given that these two are evenly matched in price (£139.99) there can only be one winner here. The Evoke, pure and simple.



B2



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roadtest

Asda's mighty fine idea



Our Baywatch campaign has persuaded one supermarket chain to fine parking bay abusers. Now **Helen Smith** wonders why the others are still stuck at red

I'm sure that, like me, many other disabled motorists were delighted to hear that Asda will now be fining people who park in its disabled bays without a badge.

For seven years, the Baywatch campaign has worked tirelessly to try and stop non-disabled shoppers parking in disabled bays at supermarkets but this is the campaign's first real breakthrough.

But fining isn't something the other supermarkets are willing to do. Tesco says: "We favour the carrot, not the stick. We don't believe introducing fines is the right solution as it can pose other challenges and we know from experience there can be occasional mitigating circumstances."

I wonder how the carrot approach would work for the types of abusers I met while filming with the BBC on the Baywatch campaign last summer. One car loaded with louts pulled into a disabled bay and the group of fit young men strolled

into the shop. When the reporter asked why the driver had parked there, he replied: "I'll park where I fucking well like, so fuck off."

I really don't think there is any other way to make people like this stop abusing bays, except by fining. Trying to explain to such people the importance of leaving disabled bays free for those who need them is a waste of time. They don't care if their parking stops a disabled person from being able to shop but the thought of being £60 worse off might just do the trick.

When we asked why he'd parked there he said: 'I'll park where I fucking well like, so fuck off'

Although Sainsbury's is trying to tackle the issue, it too has not yet gone as far as Asda. Sainsbury's says that unless a customer has a clear mobility difficulty, all it will do is put a notice on a



Space invaders: all spelled out in blue and yellow

car wrongly parked in a disabled bay. But on my last shopping trip to Sainsbury's, there were plenty of abusers, no free spaces and not a notice in sight.

Morrisons also still hasn't committed itself to fining. Morrisons says: "Our store staff are vigilant at monitoring the carpark site. If cars are found to be parked inappropriately, verbal warnings are given to the car owner." Morrisons may well be vigilant and scored best in the Baywatch

survey but verbal warnings don't work as well as fining.

Asda's decision has attracted the attention of Liberal Democrat MP Paul Rowen, who has tabled an early day motion calling on the other supermarkets to follow suit. It's unlikely to be debated in the Commons but it shows that the plight of disabled shoppers has finally been acknowledged by a small number of MPs.

Meanwhile, until the other supermarkets follow suit, let's all head for Asda.



The estate we're in

Volvo's new estate is no wardrobe on wheels. **Paul Carter** and **Jamie Trounce** take the V50 and its shark-like front end for a spin

The V50 is the estate version of the saloon S40, essentially a slightly more compact and sleeker V70.

Gone are the wardrobe on wheels stylings of Volvos gone by; instead an angled rear and almost shark-like front-end position the V50 against the premium-badged BMW and Audi estates.

As you would expect from a Volvo, it's a well-built, solid car, that carries a presence from the outside.

There's no denying that the V50 is a sizeable family car – and once inside this becomes even more apparent. There is a real feeling of space, whether you are sitting in the front or the back, and there are some really clever design features



to accommodate more space, such as integrated storage units and containers.

The dashboard itself is particularly impressive, and being in the driver's seat is akin to sitting in the cockpit of a jet-fighter – there are buttons and lights and dials absolutely everywhere. Despite the array of technology and electronics in your eyeline, it never feels overwhelming. The controls are intuitive and feature a graphical display for things like temperature

and fan speed.

The leather seats are extremely comfortable, with the driver's fully electronically-adjustable. It seems a little strange that the same comfort isn't afforded to the passenger seat.

In terms of accessibility, the V50 acquits itself well. The doors open very wide, and the footwells are large enough for someone to curl up and fall asleep in, so anyone who needs wide sills for entry and exit is well accommodated for.

Boot space is rather disappointing for an estate car of this size, although the rear seats do fold down if additional space is needed.

Drive-wise, the V50 is a solid, if unremarkable performer. The suspension is very firm and provides a decent ride, with smooth steering. It is let down slightly, though, by the rather weak engine. The 1.6 engine in the model we drove didn't feel particularly nippy around town.

All in all, the V50 is a well-built, decent-performing family estate that would be perfect for those needing a bigger vehicle for their access requirements, but not wanting to go the next step with an MPV or WAV.



The 1.8S model is available on Motability for an advance payment of £249, ranging right up to the 2.4i SE Lux model for an advance of £4,921.

sportnow

By Paul Carter

EHRC: school games ban 'illegal'

Children with learning difficulties will be able to compete in the UK School Games after organisers agreed to stage events exclusively for them.

The move comes after the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) told the Youth Sport Trust that excluding children with learning difficulties was "discriminatory and unlawful".

But a spokeswoman for the Youth Sports Trust claimed that meetings on inclusion had already been held before the EHRC got involved and that the EHRC's statement was an "extreme interpretation" of what had happened.

"Rather than a ban that's been lifted it's more accurate to say that we're now working to include children with learning difficulties," she said.

Steve Grainger, chief



Tarnished gold: Spain's basketball 'winners' weren't disabled

executive of the Youth Sport Trust, said: "Following recent dialogue with Mencap, we have agreed to work with them and the national governing bodies of sport to explore the opportunities and timescales for bringing

in specific events and to ensure that there are clear pathways for young people with learning disabilities to progress from local to national level competition."

The paucity of events for children with learning

difficulties reflects a ruling by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) excluding people with learning difficulties from the Paralympics, following the stripping of the Spanish basketball team of their gold medals in 2000 after 10 of the 12 members were shown not to be disabled.

Mark Harper, shadow minister for disabled people, welcomed the news. "I've campaigned for this with the British Paralympic Association and I'm delighted that this progress has been made."

Baroness Jane Campbell, who chairs the EHRC disability committee, said: "We will not hesitate to use our legal powers to challenge unlawful discrimination. We'll now be working to overturn the IPC ban and ensure these same young people can take part in the Paralympics in 2012."

Overseas football gets the red card

Proposals by the Premier League to play ten matches abroad have been criticised by a disabled supporters' group.

Under the plans, an

additional "international round" of 10 matches would take place overseas each January – most likely outside Europe – from the 2010/2011 season onwards.

But concern has been voiced by the National Association of Disabled Supporters (NADS) that existing inequality in

matchday experiences will be made worse by Premier League games being played in countries without the legislative protection given to disabled people by the Disability Discrimination Act.

NADS said that disabled supporters already face many challenges following their teams away from

home, without having to trek round the globe to places that might be inaccessible.

Its chair, Joyce Cook, added: "At a time when we are urging the Premier League to put pressure on their clubs, it is disappointing to learn of their intent to make following football even more difficult."

Norfolk wins second Australian Open title

Britain's Peter Norfolk overcame arch rival and world number one David Wagner to claim his second Australian Wheelchair Tennis Open quad singles title in Melbourne.

Norfolk, the current Paralympic quad singles champion, overcame the American in straight sets to take the match 6-2 6-3.

The win was Norfolk's second grand slam title in five months – in a contest that ran alongside the

mainstream Australian Open tennis championships – after returning from a shoulder injury to claim the US Open title in September.

He said: "I'm delighted with my performance this week and to win my second Australian Open title. It is

an honour and a privilege to be integrated into the grand slams."

Norfolk, with Canadian Sarah Hunter, had previously missed out on a second title when they were defeated in the quad doubles final by Wagner and Nick Taylor.

Q&A: David Weir

In our third Paralympics profile ahead of Beijing, we meet wheelchair athlete David Weir

How did you first get involved in disability sport?

My brothers were both amateur boxers so it was only natural I would follow suit. My family always encouraged me to participate in sport and I tried many different ones before settling on wheelchair racing. My father will be seen in a TV advertising campaign for a well-known insurance brand with me from the week of 1 March. I recently flew to Africa to film the TV advertising campaign while my Dad recorded his part in the UK.

What is your biggest sporting achievement so far?

Three times London marathon winner and world records in 200, 400, 1,500 and 5,000 metres.

What is your biggest disappointment in sport so far?

Not being a contender for BBC Sports Personality.

What are your ambitions for Beijing and beyond?

Gold medals at Beijing and to keep my world records.

Who are your sporting heroes?

Heinz Frei [Swiss wheelchair racer].

Who is your tip to be the next star of GB Paralympic sport?

John McFall, amputee runner.

Do you think the GB team is in good shape for the Beijing games, and beyond that, London?

Yes, it is in good shape but we need to look at bringing



JAMIE TROUNCE

David Weir: by day, a wheelchair racer; by night, a DJ

children into wheelchair racing more seriously if the sport is to continue in the UK, because there are some very good Japanese, Thai and Chinese wheelchair racers moving up the ranks.

What are your interests away from sport?

I love to DJ, mixing house

music and stuff like that. It's my hobby and I have played a few bars in south London. I would eventually like to do the clubs but I can't while I'm racing because I need my rest and I'd be up half the night. It's something I'm definitely looking forward to when I finish my career.

artsreview

INVISIBLE NO LONGER

An exciting books initiative is putting disabled children centre stage, says picture book writer **Katharine Quarmby**



Michael Rosen, the Children's Laureate, describes picture book creation as a "complex art form, that passes on its meanings, makes its suggestions in ways that call on readers to make many, many creative leaps, many, many investigations, many, many connections between parts of pages, different pages, forwards and backwards through the book". Children use picture books as a way of understanding their place in the world. But disabled children have been hampered by their near invisibility in the genre.

Hence the In the Picture campaign, run by the charity Scope and funded by the Big Lottery. Susan

Clow, the project manager, came up with the idea after working for many years with families with disabled children. They told her that they couldn't find books that featured disabled children. Clow tracked down *Two Left Feet*, a cheery book that puts a child with a walking frame centre stage, and gave it to a disabled child called Celine Matthews. "Celine took this book with her everywhere she went, it gave her a story about why she was walking with a frame," she says.

From this modest beginning sprang the campaign which has involved the Disabled Parent's Network, disabled writers such as Joyce

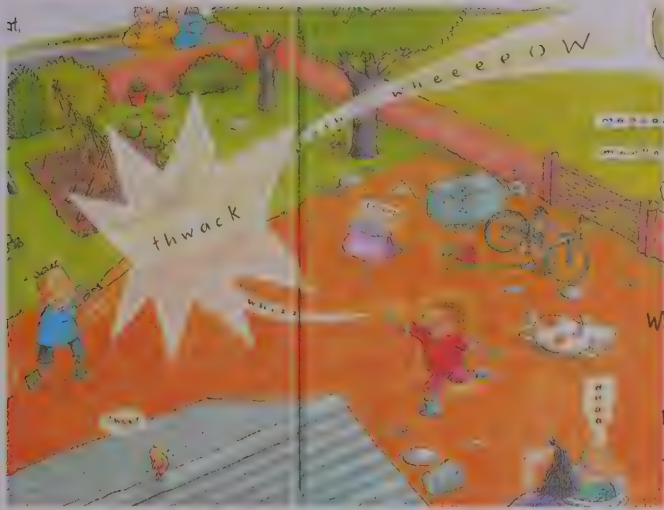
Dunbar, Kathy Saunders, a disabled children's book consultant, disabled children and many other committed writers, illustrators and publishers. Quentin Blake, the well-loved writer and illustrator, supports the scheme because he says that illustrators need to draw images that represent modern day experience, rather than archaic ones. "If you are an illustrator, you operate, in a sense, with signals. You know, in the old days, long after schoolmasters had stopped wearing gowns, they always wore gowns in pictures because that's how you knew they were schoolmasters, so you have a set of almost clichés, or signals anyway, and of course, they get out of date." Now his fluid style of drawing graces the campaign and publicity materials, with disabled children portrayed in the same joyous style as their non-disabled peers.

And Joyce Dunbar, a celebrated, deaf writer of children's books, is also an enthusiastic supporter. Her book, *Moonbird*, illustrated

by Jane Ray, is a loving story that puts a deaf prince centre stage – and has a happy ending. She says that the campaign is important. "Presence is what we are asking for, not exclusive, but inclusive." It has already made great strides in increasing awareness. But, she says, because "disability is neither cute nor glamorous", many publishers are "treading very warily" although some are forcing the pace of change.

The campaign has several arms. Its website has an extensive list of books with disabled characters, an "image bank" and an on-line gallery where disabled children can post pictures. In the Picture also works with publishers, illustrators and writers.

Susan Clow says that the campaign is not only about more visibility, but also about countering current representations of disability – usually a poorly-drawn wheelchair. As a result, Child's Play (International), now shows disabled children wearing splints or hearing aids (*The Ding Dong Bag*, pictured above right), for example.



Publishers Franklin Watts and Kidpremiership have also adapted their illustrations.

Many publishers stress that they want to promote inclusion, rather than a

niche market. Janetta Otter-Barry, editorial director at Frances Lincoln, (and the publisher of my first picture book), has published three books with disabled main

characters which she says appeal to all readers.

Looking after Louis (far left), about a boy with autism at school, written by Lesley Ely and drawn with panache by Polly Dunbar, is, she says, "a lovely school story for any child".

The campaign to celebrate and picture disabled children for who they are has less than a year to go.

- www.childrenintheimage.org.uk
- *Fussy Freya*, by Katharine Quarmby, illustrated by Piet Grobler, is published by Frances Lincoln this month

Five great books

Moonbird – by Joyce Dunbar, illustrated by Jane Ray, Doubleday Press

Seal Surfer – written and illustrated by Michael Foreman, Andersen Press

Dan and Diesel – by Charlotte Hudson, illustrated by Lindsey Gardiner, Red Fox Picture Books

The Ding Dong Bag – by Polly Peters, illustrated by Jess Stockham, Child's Play (International) Ltd

Looking after Louis – by Lesley Ely, illustrated by Polly Dunbar, Frances Lincoln

FILM

THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY



The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, directed by the artist Julian Schnabel, is the story of Jean Bauby, the editor of *Elle* magazine who had a massive stroke that left him

with locked-in syndrome. He is fully aware of what is happening but is unable to communicate the experience. He feels stuck in a diving bell yet within lies a butterfly waiting to emerge, hence the title. Matthieu Amalric plays Bauby with great sensitivity.

Assisted by his speech therapist, Henriette, (Josee Croze), he learns to communicate using blinks of an eye and a word board.

The film is beautifully shot and beautifully acted and every actor is beautiful. That is its

problem. Every image is just too perfect; it all seems too stylised.

Bauby is flawed and fallible. When he should be communicating he is instead aroused by his translator's cleavage. When his ex-girlfriend comes to visit him he lingers on the hem of her dress rather than listen to her. Yet, due to the artifice of Schnabel's direction, every scene seems too mannered to give genuine warmth and compassion to Bauby's fragility. Even Bauby's clothing is immaculate. The film is disability as would be presented in

Vogue magazine.

The hospital is by the ocean and there are numerous scenes with him collecting his thoughts, pondering on the past, among sun-dappled sand dunes. A man who drove expensive sports cars and lived in luxury apartments is now only alive through his eyelids. We can see pain but are less able to feel it. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, as befits a film by a leading artist, is a film of beautiful imagery. It is a fascinating story. I admired the film but couldn't love it.

Michael Shamash

artsreview

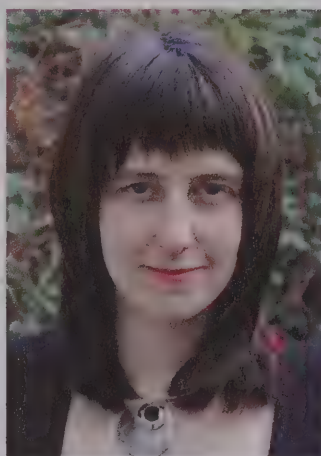
The write stuff

Playwright Nicola Werenowska is finally realising her dreams of a theatre career, says **Maxine Frances Roper**

Like others in her field, playwright Nicola Werenowska is creative, intelligent and articulate. Less predictably, she has a hidden disability which, undiagnosed for many years, overshadowed her dream of a career in theatre.

Nicola has dyspraxia, a condition inhibiting coordination, spatial awareness and short-term memory, leading to problems with practical skills and learning styles. People with dyspraxia often have high verbal abilities but weak non-verbal reasoning, appearing clumsy, physically awkward and forgetful. Their difficulties can make them avoid group activities like sports and drama.

"I would always struggle with the easy bits – things to do with coordination and practical tasks – but nobody could say why. I'd get overwhelmed and couldn't cope." Though she battled with everything from PE to tying shoelaces, she had a great writing talent. At 16,



her first play was given a rehearsed reading at the Royal Court. She wanted to study performing arts but worried about her lack of visual-spatial skills and poor body awareness.

Instead, she gained a first-class languages degree and a PhD in German literature. She had depression throughout university, and chose postgraduate study partly out of fear she wouldn't cope in a job. Her diagnosis of dyspraxia finally came six years ago when she had a breakdown during a stint as a French teacher: "I was teaching what's quite a practical subject at that level and couldn't deal with it at all. I found it hard to use the

photocopier or scissors because my coordination is so bad." A school counsellor who knew several children with dyspraxia identified her condition.

Nicola's diagnosis set her free to pursue her ambitions. She began writing plays, achieving shortlistings for several competitions, including Channel 4's *The Play's the Thing*. Her first major production was staged last year by the regional theatre company Eastern Angels.

"When I'm in rehearsal I might explain to actors that I'm not very good visually, and I don't have any issues about my difficulties because I know why. In the past I'd have felt embarrassed, ashamed, that there was something wrong with me. I mustn't show to other people because they'd think I'm weird."

Nicola agrees that with the right support, drama can hugely benefit those with

dyspraxia, improving spatial awareness and coordination. She has recently been developing a play which directly tackles dyspraxia, *On Your Own*, with Tom Thomasson, who also has dyspraxia. And she increasingly hears of young people with dyspraxia who love drama. "Some talk about an inherent link between neurodiversity and creativity. I think if you're dyspraxic you've probably experienced some sort of discrimination or sense of otherness. People who've experienced that tend to want to express it artistically."

Nicola is currently rehearsing a play with Cambridge theatre company Menagerie. "I'm not sure proud is the right word," she says of her achievements. But she admits she's now feeling comfortable in herself and her work. Hopefully her awareness raising will help other people with dyspraxia in theatre do the same.

• **To contact DANDA, a support group for adults with specific learning difficulties, such as dyspraxia, visit www.danda.org.uk**

→ Up-to-the-minute listings

For all the very latest arts listings visit www.disabilitynow.org.uk/arts

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- Wills and Trusts.

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legalandinformationday12April08@scope.org.uk

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One Crown Office Row

Speakers

Wendy Banks,
Scope

Andrew Hannam and
Philippa Bruce-Kerr,
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Beverley Watkins,
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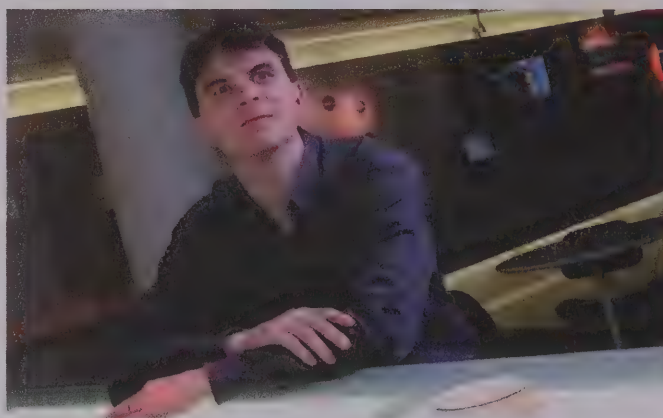
Snazzy websites may look cool but they're shutting us out, complains **Robin Christopherson**

While the internet may be revolutionising social networking and creating exciting new opportunities in leisure and business for the majority of the population, this Brave New World is certainly not as democratic and inclusive as it might first appear.

Our quarterly State of the eNation reports assess how easy it is to access websites – a legal requirement since 1999. Sadly, we find that social networking sites not only conform to the generally poor standards that we have noted over the last five years but are often the worst offenders.

In our most recent review (January 2008), we looked at *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *YouTube*, *Yahoo* and *Bebo*. All posed significant barriers to disabled access, often discouraging users from even registering in the first place.

Our review included input from users with all sorts of disabling conditions: vision and hearing impairments as well as motor, literacy and cognitive difficulties. Many can only use the internet by enlarging text and altering



Robin Christopherson: shames dodgy websites every quarter

colour schemes or by using screen-reading or voice-recognition software.

How did they fare? Here's what three of our blind testers said:

- "When I registered there was a visual verification code that I had to ask a sighted person to read out for me. I think this is awful treatment of blind people who use their services."

- "The main problems are instant messaging [and using] a chat programme... *MySpace* and others are impossible to use."

- "Often the sheer amount of material on a page, and having no real idea how to begin to navigate such a large amount of info, makes

it difficult to summon the will to continue! Badly labelled links in my case, make it extremely difficult to find anything meaningful."

As part of the registration process all sites require the identification of a CAPTCHA image – a visual code that has been distorted so that it cannot be deciphered by malicious software. Some sites offer speaking links for these registration codes but these too are intentionally distorted and many thousands of users cannot hear or make sense of them.

Even where a link is provided to customer services, untrained staff or automated telephone systems invariably point users back to the website, creating an unbreakable circle.

UK participation in social networking online is the highest in Europe: some 80 per cent of internet users now make more than 25 million site visits a month. Sadly, with a disabled population of some 10 million potential users, our most popular social networking sites seem to be inadvertently imposing a technological lock-out on those with most to gain – those who are arguably already the most socially excluded in the community.

• **Robin Christopherson is head of accessibility services at computing and disability consultancy AbilityNet. For the full report see: www.abilitynet.org.uk/enation**

→ Have your say

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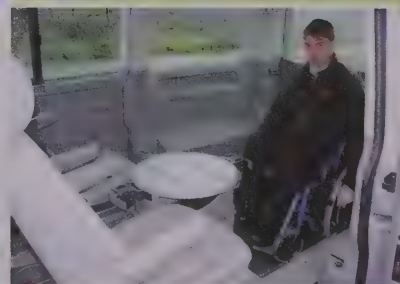


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backlash



No yolking matter

If you can't make a pancake without breaking eggs, **Paul Carter** is going to have to go without

As I write this, I'm in a bit of a huff. Hard to believe I know, but it's true; my sunny disposition and usual cheery, positive demeanour have taken a back seat to mild bitterness and seething.

The reason being, today is Pancake Day. Which I hate. All over the country, people are stood in their immaculate kitchens laughing and flinging batter around with gay abandon, while little old me has to make do with sitting in front of the telly with only a TV dinner for company, watching David Attenborough worrying a newt.

How can anyone hate Pancake Day, I hear you ask? All that sugar and lemon juice. It's great fun!

Actually, you're wrong. It's rubbish. I detest pancakes mainly because of their main ingredient. Eggs. My culinary nemesis.

You see, to me, eggs are the food equivalent of a flight of wet steps and no lift. I can't get in. I can't break them. Well of course I can break them, I just can't break them in the right way.



WOMAN'S WEEKLY / REX FEATURES

There's no separating egg whites or yolk beating going on in my kitchen.

(Actually, there's not much of anything that goes on in my kitchen but I'm trying to sound all helpless and vulnerable: Valentine's Day is just around the corner.)

Once you suffer the ignominy of picking eggshell out of your eyelashes, you lose a bit of affection for eggs

I've always known that I've not been able to use eggs, but my voracious contempt for them and Pancake Day stems, like many of my life's most crushingly humiliating moments, from

my time as a student.

One year, I tried valiantly to make pancakes for my flatmates. Nice gesture, huh? I thought so too until I managed to end up with egg all over my face. Literally. Everywhere. Even in my eye.

You see, with a degree of quite staggering idiocy from someone allegedly among the country's educational élite (Get me! Hah!), I decided to try using my nose as a hinge. Yes, yes, I know, but you live and learn.

Once you've suffered the ignominy of picking eggshell out of your eyelashes, you lose a bit of affection for eggs.

But back to the pancakes. Now, as far as I'm concerned, if you're going to have a day

dedicated to a food, at least make it a good one. Like a full English, or steak and chips.

And while we're at it, can we have a dish that doesn't involve throwing it into the air while cooking it. What's that all about?

Firstly, its main ingredient comes in its own impregnable packaging and then when/if you manage to get it out, to cook it in the "traditional" manner, you need to have enough manual dexterity and disregard for human safety to flail around with a searing hot pan, tossing scalding fat around; it's madness. I haven't chucked food across the kitchen again since the eggshell incident.

Maybe the EHRC can look into bringing an action against pancakes. They must breach the DDA in some respect. Ridiculous food.

I think it's time we campaign for a far more accessible national food day. Preferably one involving things I can microwave. Speaking of which, all this talk of food has made me hungry. Now where did I leave that chicken tikka massala...?

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BETWEEN THE SHEETS

worklife



It's the law

Solicitor **Anne Luttmann-Johnson** says she has always been upfront about her impairment

In 1984 I was just completing my law degree when I sustained a spinal cord injury in a road traffic accident. Once I had got over the initial trauma of my injuries, I realised that being in a wheelchair was not going to prevent me from becoming a solicitor.

I was fortunate because during the mid-eighties there were plenty of training contracts available. Even so, I had to look hard to find a firm that I wanted to work for, whose building was accessible. I finally got a job with Penningtons,

although access was not ideal: initially they did not have a loo that I could use, and there was no lift.

When applying for jobs, I did not include my disability on my CV, but I did mention it in my covering letter. I was also very upfront about my disability in interviews. I did not want the people interviewing me to make any assumptions about what I could and couldn't do, so to avoid this I would bring the subject up myself, and ask them if they had any concerns.

I spent three years with

Penningtons, but I soon realised that I wanted to use my experience of disability and my knowledge of the law to help others, so in 1990 I moved to London to work for the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA).

I spent five years developing SIA's Legal Claims Service, helping injured people and their families obtain specialist advice on claiming compensation. I also started to prepare expert reports for compensation cases, detailing the additional costs of disability.

In 1995, I left and set up my own business working as an expert witness. I was working from home, which cut out commuting time, and gave me an extra two hours a day.

In 2004, I was approached by Alexander Harris, a niche firm of solicitors helping injured people to claim compensation. They asked me to provide a legal support service to their clients, helping with issues such as housing, benefits, mobility, equipment needs,

and people's personal and social lives.

I have now found my perfect job. I still work from home, although I am frequently out visiting clients. My day is spent helping people, sometimes by just talking to them, providing information, sharing experiences and trying to find practical

I did not want the people interviewing me to make any assumptions about what I could and couldn't do

solutions to problems. Other days I can be chasing up the statutory authorities, helping clients get the right benefits and services.

In 2006, Alexander Harris merged with Irwin Mitchell, and I now work for the UK's largest firm of personal injury lawyers. I have enormous job satisfaction, using my legal training and personal experience of disability to help others.

ANNE LUTTMAN-JOHNSON: CAREER PATH

- 1984 – graduated from Oxford Polytechnic with a degree in law and politics
- 1986 – articulated clerk with Penningtons in Surrey
- 1989 – assistant solicitor at Penningtons
- 1990 – moved to London to work as legal claims

- officer for SIA
- 1995 – set up her own business as an expert witness
- 2004 – joined Alexander Harris as client support manager
- 2006 – joined Irwin Mitchell as client support manager

RECRUITMENT



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Andell Maraj
Office manager



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RECRUITMENT



Non-Executive Director

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions seeks to appoint a Non-Executive Director to the Board of Remploy Ltd, Britain's leading provider of employment services for people with disabilities and health conditions. The Board has responsibility for ensuring that the Company fulfils the aims and objectives set by the Secretary of State in its employment of disabled people. It does this by:

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- Ensuring proper use of public funds; and
- Promoting Remploy's corporate identity.

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You will also have the ability to contribute and demonstrate consensus, interpersonal and team building skills. Board and operational level experience either in a public or private sector context is essential.

A commitment and understanding of disability employment rights and issues would be an advantage.

The post attracts remuneration of £7,500 per annum plus expenses. The appointment is initially for a three-year term and Board members normally spend about two days a month on Remploy business. Board meetings normally take place at the Company's Headquarters in Coventry.

If you have the experience and qualities required and can make a contribution to the strategic direction of this high profile business then please email Lynette.carr@dpw.gsi.gov.uk or, write to or telephone Lynette Carr at Disability and Work Division, Department for Work and Pensions, Level 10, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ (Tel: 0114 267 7445) to receive an application pack. Please indicate whether you would like an electronic or hard copy of the application form or require an application form in an alternative format.

The closing date for applications for this post is 6pm on Wednesday 12 March 2008. Late applications will not be accepted.

Applications are particularly welcomed from people with disabilities, members of ethnic minority groups and women. Remploy is an Equal Opportunities Employer.

DWP Department for Work and Pensions



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RECRUITMENT

department for children, schools and families

Chair – the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB)

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families invites applications for the position of Chair of the STRB to take up post from April 2008.

The STRB considers aspects of pay and conditions for almost half a million teachers and school leaders in England and Wales. As an independent body, it makes recommendations to Government on school teachers' pay, professional duties and working time. Its recent work has included consideration of levels of teachers' pay for the period from April 2008 to 2011 and a review of pay and conditions for school leaders.

We are particularly seeking an individual with strong leadership and substantial record of achievement at senior level, ideally in large organisations. You should have an appreciation of public sector reward issues, including financial considerations and the employee relations context and senior-level chairing experience and skills. You will be able to gain the respect and confidence of colleagues and stakeholders, involve others through active debate and logical argument, listen to and question colleagues and stakeholders with different views, thus building consensus.

With strong analytical skills you will also be able to analyse and interpret detailed information, take account of stakeholders'

views and develop independent, credible and workable solutions to complex and sensitive issues. You should also be able to present key issues, decisions and the underpinning rationale accurately and persuasively in person and in writing.

Candidates must be able to give around 30 days per year to the role for three years from April 2008 to 2011. The STRB meets approximately 18-20 times per year in London, with the frequency and schedule of meetings determined by its work programme.

Remuneration is £350 per day for STRB meetings, business and visits. Travel and related expenses are reimbursed.

For further information and details of how to apply, please send an e-mail bearing your name, address and reference STRB to: ndpb.team@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk or send a postcard to Mr Paul Betteridge, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Westminster Suite, Ground Floor, Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA. Telephone: 020 7273 5140.

The closing date for applications is 12 March 2008.

Successful applicants must be available for interview on 17 and 18 April 2008.

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WARNING

We have been warned about a scam involving people from overseas who say they want to buy a product and who offer to pay using cheques, Western Union money transfers and certified cheques. Although no *Disability Now* readers to our knowledge have been hit by this, please be particularly wary of accepting cheques from overseas. For more information, visit the Metropolitan Police website.

DEADLINE - Disability Now

April published 29 March. Classified deadlines: Booking: 10 March. Copy: 12 March.

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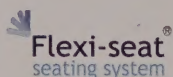
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